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ROYAL ENTERED THE FAMILIAR ROOM, THINKING TO MEET A STRANGER, AND THERE CAME SLOWLY TOWARDS HIM—THE WOMAN WHO HAD PROMISED TO BE HIS WIFE.

NURSE NANCY.

BY FLORENCE HODGKINSON.

Author of "George Simpson's Luck,"
"Dolly's Legacy," &c., &c.

[A NOVELETTE]

COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.

CHAPTER I.

EVERYONE who knew Sir Royal Clinton was sorry for him, though not even his most intimate friends would have ventured to express their pity to his face—so proud and sensitive was the young baronet.

The handsomest man about town, the last scion of a grand old family, and yet—as one sympathetic dowager remarked to another—he was "a pauper, and likely to remain so."

"They say the woman is only twenty-five, so she may live another fifty-years," said Lady Dashwood to her husband; "and our poor Royal will be a beggar all his days."

"Not a beggar, my dear," corrected the earl. "Royal Clinton never asked anyone for a shilling, and would starve rather than accept one. Of course, his cousin's marriage was very unfortunate for him, but such things happen every day."

Lady Dashwood sighed.

"Really Claude, you take things too

lightly. If I thought men committed such folly as Hector Clinton's every day I should despise the whole sex."

Lord Dashwood smiled.

Albeit a little pompous and formal in manner, his heart was in the right place. He did not openly lament Royal Clinton's misfortunes, as his wife did, but he felt for the young fellow very truly.

"I only meant to observe, Violet, that men marry every day, and Sir Hector was only following the example of his fellows when he took to himself a wife."

"Claude, you are too provoking. You speak as though he had been young enough to make his being married natural."

"He was only forty-five," suggested the earl.

Our next Serial Story, is by Florence Hodgkinson.

"Fifty," corrected my lady; "and he had given out for years that he should never marry, and brought up Royal as his heir."

"Well, my dear," persisted Lord Dashwood, who seemed resolved to defend his dead friend, "perhaps he changed his mind, and thought he should like to leave his property to a child of his own. He had provided for young Royal for fifteen years, given him the best of educations, and started him in life. It is not many men who would have done so much for a distant cousin."

"And then, when he was old enough to enjoy life, when he was engaged to one of the prettiest girls in England, what does the monster do but calmly announce his own wedding. Royal loses fiancée and prospects at one blow; and six months later, when his cousin dies childless, and one might hope to see poor Royal righted, lo! and behold Sir Hector leaves a will, bequeathing everything to his widow!"

"Only for her life, my dear."

"And she is as young, or younger, than Royal. I call it shameful."

"She may marry again," suggested Lord Dashwood, trying in vain to comfort his warm-hearted wife, who had thrown herself heart and soul into Royal's troubles. "In that case, my dear, she would lose everything but five hundred a-year."

"It isn't likely," sighed the countess. "Those low-born women are too fond of money."

"We have no proof that Lady Clinton is low-born. Sir Hector met her abroad and married her. Nothing whatever of her family or antecedents has transpired."

"Do you think, if she had had a single respectable relation we should not have heard of it by this time? No," said the countess, determinedly; "I am sure that she was an adventuress, who took advantage of Sir Hector's infatuation to marry him and ruin poor Royal."

The Dashwoods were distantly related to Royal's mother—quite sufficiently of kin to the young man to feel his misfortunes, and to be indignant with the Honourable Rosa Orme, because she made Sir Hector's engagement a pretext for jilting Mr. Clinton.

Privately, Lord Dashwood thought his favourite, Royal, had acted unwisely in refusing to be present at Sir Hector's wedding, and in writing to the latter very disrespectfully of his bride.

To the earl's mind it would have been better for Royal to have smothered his feelings, and continued on good terms with his noble cousin; then Sir Hector might, at least, have provided for his future, instead of literally cutting him off without even the proverbial shilling, while the estates, the town-house, and vast income all went to the young widow.

Sir Royal went to the funeral, though he was resolved not to meet Lady Clinton. As she kept her own rooms during his brief stay his wishes were easily achieved.

He found the friends and neighbours, who had come from Blankshire to the quiet northern watering-place where Sir Hugh died to attend his funeral, knew as little as himself of the widow.

There was a groan of indignation as the will was finished, and Lord Dashwood actually forgot his usual self-command, and asked the family lawyer, Mr. Carrington, how he could have brought himself to draw up such an unjust testament.

"Sir Hector would have found plenty of other people to do his bidding had I refused," explained Mr. Carrington; "and for Sir Royal's sake I wished to keep the business in my hands, that I might, at least, secure his ultimate inheritance."

"When he is too old to enjoy anything," growled the earl.

"I think I understand," and Royal Clinton shook hands with Mr. Carrington warmly. "You drew up the will, thinking, if you refused, my cousin would make one yet more against my interests."

"Something of the kind, Sir Royal. I knew Lady Clinton was young, and I guessed she would have a crowd of poor relations eager to benefit at her expense. As the will stands, you see, she can do no more than spend the yearly income; and she is bound out of that to keep both Redbourne and the house in Park-lane in perfect repair. It is only poverty for one generation, Sir Royal. Your children will enjoy their rights as fully as though your cousin had never married."

"Only I shall never have any children," returned Royal, whose heart was pretty sore still at Rosa Orme's treachery, although it had happened fully six months ago.

"Time will show," said the lawyer, smiling; and then the guests departed, and Royal went back to London to his quiet bachelor chambers near Piccadilly to think out the problem of what he was to do with his life.

Lady Dashwood in her vehement pity had called him a "beggar," but things were not quite so bad as that.

He had inherited three hundred a year from his mother's marriage settlement; and her guardians, having a wholesome dread of a young man's extravagance, had so tied up the small property that Royal could not touch the capital. Besides this, he possessed the furniture of the pleasant chambers, a couple of horses, a small library, a nice little sum at the bank, and—this fact was a great comfort to him in his present plight—absolutely no debts.

Sir Hector had been in the habit of paying him a handsome allowance half-yearly, the last cheque had come only a week before his breach with the Viscount; and, feeling he must depend in future on himself, the young man had paid off all he owed, and been careful since to make all his purchases for ready money.

It was June. The London season was at its height; and as Sir Royal walked across the park he could see a crowd of carriages, whose fair owners would have given him, though a detrimental, a ready welcome had he joined them; but the young Baronet was in no mood for society. He wanted to be alone.

He refused his servant's suggestion of dinner; and, giving orders he was to be denied by everyone, he threw himself into an easy chair, lighted a cigar, and sat down to face the problem of his future.

To live in his present style on three hundred a year was impossible. Even by selling his horses and dismissing his groom it would be an intolerably tight fit; and Royal had no notion of descending to the condition of many of his acquaintances, and living, or, rather, struggling, on the credit system.

He was by no means faultless, but there was something essentially noble about him; and, to his mind, debt and dishonour were synonymous.

Three hundred a year, and he paid a third of that sum for chambers and attendance. He belonged to one of the most expensive clubs in London. Clearly if he was to keep out of difficulties he must either change his habits, or find some sort of way of adding to his income.

Royal was seven-and-twenty, and he had never followed any profession. As he reviewed the four best known callings, army, navy, church, and law, he acknowledged that each was hopeless, since what he

wanted was to make money at once. Medicine, architecture, painting, seemed equally remote in their promise of a livelihood. Royal put up one hand to his head, and fairly groaned.

"I really seem a hopeless case. Here I am at twenty-seven, young, strong, and able-bodied, with—I should say—an average amount of brains, and free from all incumbrance, yet there doesn't seem any opening for me to earn a shilling. I suppose philosophers would say I have enough to exist on, and ought not to take the bread out of other people's mouths; but I don't fancy sitting down with my three hundred a year, and reconciling myself never to have any more. I suppose I could have a semi-detached house at Peckham, and a maid-of-all-work; but I should certainly have to forewear the club and these diggings."

Perhaps the secret of his anxiety to keep in his own world was that he did not want Miss Orme to be able to justify her falseness by saying that, as he proved himself unable to keep himself according to his birth, he would certainly have failed still more to keep a wife.

Royal cared very little for mere gaiety and pleasure, but he did want to hold his head erect in the eyes of the world he had once thought his own. He did long to make such a name and position that Rosa Orme might realise she had thrown away something more than an honest heart.

Lord Dashwood would gladly have given his kinsman a helping hand, and had hinted already he might get him an attachéship abroad if he would turn his thoughts to diplomacy; but, unfortunately, little as his country had done for him, Royal had a great affection for England, and had a strong aversion to expatriating himself. He thought over his prospects, or rather his want of them, till midnight, and then went to bed without having formed a single plan, to dream uncomfortably of Lady Clinton pursuing him with a currant cake, and declaring he must be hungry.

"Well," reflected the young Baronet, as he dressed the next day, "at least I have not come to that yet. I may be in pretty low water, but I don't think I need fear hunger."

There was quite a pile of letters awaiting him on the breakfast-table—notes of condolence on his cousin's death, and delicately veiled curiosity as to whether he had got his rights—covert sneers at the widow, and gentle hopes "poor Sir Hector had seen his mistake at last."

"What a shame it all is," cried Royal, flinging down a note a little more effusive than the rest. "As if I didn't know that now she is mistress of Redbourne all these people will hold out their friendship to Lady Clinton and send me to the right-about. There's a deal of hypocrisy in life."

But this philosophical reflection was disturbed by the sight of the last letter of the heap, which, by an accident, he had not noticed before. It was so different from all the other that Sir Royal looked at it with languid curiosity. It bore neither crest nor monogram; and instead of the delicate scent and eloquent square envelope affected by most of his correspondents, he saw that the letter was folded in three, and its cover was one of the ordinary commercial shape used for business purposes.

It was not a bill. Both writing and envelope were superior to a shopkeeper's; beside, the postmark was E.C., and Royal could never recollect making a single purchase east of Temple Bar.

"It's strange," he reflected, opening it carefully. "I did not think anyone remembered I had a second name nowadays. Since my mother died I have dropped it entirely."

But the superscription was certainly "Sir Royal Trevlyn Clinton, Bart." and so someone existed who remembered that his mother had been a Miss Trevlyn and had given her boy her maiden name. The note was short and simple. It was written on a sheet of paper stamped "The Imperial Insurance Company, Queen-street, E.C.," and ran as follows:—

"DEAR SIR,

"If you will call upon me any morning this week before three o'clock I shall have much pleasure in submitting a proposal to you which may prove to your advantage,—

"Yours faithfully,

THOMAS EAGLES."

Sir Royal read the note three times through before he put it down, and then he was so far from understanding its contents that he fancied it must be a hoax. He had by no means decided whether he should take any notice of the request to call in Queen-street, when the door opened, and his servant announced, "Mr. Osborne, please Sir Royal."

Rex Osborne and Royal Clinton had been friends at school and college, and the attachment between them had never lessened afterwards, though perforce, they saw less of each other when Mr. Osborne took a curacy in Essex, and Royal settled down in the Piccadilly chambers.

Of the two, Royal was the more brilliant scholar, and the more handsome man; but Mr. Osborne had a true earnest face, which inspired trust, and had made Royal thought sadly to himself—far better use of his moderate abilities than his friend of his more striking talents.

"I came up to London on a day's shopping," said the young curate, "and who should I meet in the train but Carrington. Of course he had heard from his father about your cousin's will, and I felt I must come here and tell you how grieved I am for your disappointment."

And for once sympathy did not jar upon Royal. He accepted the condolence as frankly as it was offered.

"To tell you the truth, Osborne, I don't know that I expected anything better. I did write the old fellow a very indignant letter about his wife; and unless he had found her out for himself he might well resent it. Somehow, I never thought of his dying. I wouldn't say it to anyone else. They would think I was regretting his fortune; but you will understand. I do wish I had made it up with the poor old fellow. He was a kind friend to me for years, and, after all, he had a right to please himself."

Rex nodded.

"Did you see her—Lady Clinton?"

"No. Unlike most women who have married above their position she seems very anxious to keep in seclusion."

"Perhaps she is better than you think!"

"I think nothing, except that she is a very lucky woman," said Royal, simply. "Ten thousand a year and Redbourne for life make a good provision for a penniless bride."

"Carrington told me his father had never seen Lady Clinton?"

"No. Hector never introduced her to any one. Well, Rex, how are things with you? Is Everton as pleasant a dwelling place as you expected?"

"I think it is pleasanter," confessed Mr. Osborne, simply. "It is the prettiest village I ever saw, and the people are most kind and friendly."

"Meaning, I suppose, the cottagers and shopkeepers!"

"There are no shops at Everton. We have to send into Chelmsford for all our purchases, but there are several nice houses

scattered about the village, and they are all nice people."

Sir Royal looked into his friend's face, and smiled, good-temperedly.

"I think I understand. One of these 'friendly' people possesses a daughter, whom you would like to convert into Mrs. Osborne. Take care, Rex, all women are heartless, mercenary creatures," here the smile faded, and his tone grew cold and cynical. "She may like to play tennis with you, but, depend upon it, she'll fly at higher game when it comes to thinking of a plain gold ring."

The young curate was not in the least offended, perhaps because he understood all his friend had suffered at Miss Orme's hands, and how she had taught him to despise her sex.

"Maria and I understand each other," he said, quietly. "But her father, though one of the nicest men I ever met, is a trifle ambitious, and so we have agreed that I am not to speak to him until my fortunes improve. A hundred and twenty pounds a year would not seem much to him."

It seemed very little to Sir Royal, being less than half the income he had just decided it was impossible for him to live on. But then Mr. Osborne was a man of simple tastes, who hated London and fashionable society as much as Royal loved both.

"I hope she'll be true to you, old fellow," said the Baronet, simply. "What is her father? A local magnate, I suppose, as he is so ambitious?"

"A self-made man, unfortunately," said Rex. "It's a pity, because it makes him attach so much importance to money. And you see, Royal, there's not much chance of my ever being rich."

"Is he rich himself?"

"Oh dear, yes, rolls in money; and loves to tell you of the days when he started in life with a shilling in his pocket—it wasn't even the proverbial half-crown. He generally goes through the history every time he gives a dinner party, till Mrs. Eagles frowns at him, and says 'Do be quiet, Tom.'"

A strange suspicion crossed Royal's brain.

"Is his name Thomas? What is his business? Believe me, Rex, I have a reason for asking, apart from curiosity."

"My dear fellow, it is no secret. Mr. Eagles has christened Thomas, but at the Lodge he is always styled 'Tom.' As to his business, I can't say what it was originally, except that it was connected with a shop. But for years he has retired, and done nothing beyond pose as a director of two or three companies. He's a clever man, and his opinion is a good deal sought after."

"Do you know, Rex, I believe I had a letter from him this morning. Look here."

Mr. Osborne read the note through, and returned it to his friend.

"That's his writing," was his comment. "But what in the world does he want to see you for?"

Sir Royal shook his head.

"I have no idea."

"Surely"—and the young curate looked alarmed—"surely, it can't be anything about Maria!"

"My dear Rex," said Royal, smiling, "Everton may be a primitive place, and Mr. Eagles fond of plain speaking, but believe me, in the nineteenth century a man doesn't send for a total stranger and ask him to marry his daughter."

"But he might think—"

Royal good-humouredly helped him out by finishing the sentence himself.

"He might think I had rank, and wanted money, while his daughter possessed the latter, and needed the former. It might seem to him a fair exchange; but don't you

worry yourself, old fellow. Even if you had never mentioned Miss Eagles' name to me I should tell her father I was not yet reduced to selling my title."

"But you'll go and see him?"

"Well, I hadn't intended doing so, but as he is your future father-in-law, perhaps a friendly interest in you may take me to Queen-street one of these days."

"Why not go this morning, and take me with you?"

Sir Royal opened his eyes.

"It's not a bad idea, Rex. But, supposing the proposal he has to submit to me does concern his daughter, could you stand quietly by and listen to it?"

"Yes," returned the curate, "because I am quite sure of Maria; and though Mr. Eagles can make things very unpleasant for us he can't make her marry you against her will."

"And equally against mine."

"You haven't seen her, Royal."

"I am not a marrying man, Rex, and, besides, I am fancy-proof; but I can see you are very anxious to know the result of Mr. Eagles' interview with me, so I am willing to go to Queen-street at once. Now, which will you do—accompany me, and perform the introduction, or wait here till I return?"

"I'd rather go with you."

Sir Royal hailed a hansom. He had not yet learned to perform his journey by omnibus, or better still, on foot. He looked just the picture of a fine, healthy young Englishman, as he dismissed the vehicle at the corner, and linking his arm within Mr. Osborne's began to walk slowly down Queen-street.

"I want to ask you something, Rex. Have you ever mentioned my name to Mr. Eagles?"

"Never."

"You see the letter was written yesterday, probably in business hours, so that it is impossible he could have known about poor Hector's will. Even if anyone present, when Carrington read it, had telegraphed a resume of the contents to Queen-street, Mr. Eagles must have written his letter before the message reached him."

"That seems strange."

"If he wrote to me, believing I was disinherited, he must either have simply jumped to the conclusion, or have been told the nature of the will by some one privy to its contents, in Hector's lifetime."

"I should say he had heard of your quarrel with Sir Hector, and had imagined you would be disinherited. I don't see how he could know anything about the will."

"But from your description I should not have fancied him a man of strong imagination."

Mr. Osborne made no reply.

They had reached the office of "The Imperial," a big handsome building, with every sign of prosperity.

The curate had been there before, and led the way to the clerk's room. Here he asked for Mr. Eagles, whose name figured on the prospectus as managing director.

"He is in his own room, sir," said a lad, civilly; "but I don't think he can see you this morning; he is unusually busy."

Sir Royal took out his card.

"I am here by Mr. Eagle's own appointment," he said, coldly. "You had better ask if he will see me."

Another minute and the two friends were shown into the manager's private sanctum.

A man of sixty turned, with iron-grey hair, shrewd grey eyes, and a sharp, but not unpleasant face, rose to greet them.

He stared at the sight of the curate, "Man alive! What has brought you here?"

"Sir Royal Clinton is my oldest friend," said Rex, simply, "and when I found he was going to call on you I offered to accompany him, and introduce you."

"Very kind, I am sure; but if my business with Sir Royal happens to be private and confidential, how then?"

Rex looked so nervous and discomfited that the baronet interposed.

"There can hardly be any secrets, sir, between people who meet for the first time. For my part I should like Mr. Osborne to hear any proposal you may have to make to me."

"Well, perhaps you'll promise beforehand not to fly out at me if I offend your pride, Sir Royal; and please remember the idea I am going to mention did not originate with me. I am but the mouthpiece of the board."

This was a favourite statement of the self-made man, albeit most people knew it was only a figure of speech, and that Mr. Eagle's voice was all powerful in the consultations in Queen-street.

"I never take offence where none is meant," said Sir Royal. "I think I partly guess your communication. Someone has been talking to you respecting my cousin, Sir Hector's, will."

"It's common rumour, Sir Royal, that he's cut you off with a shilling," returned the self-made man; "and it so happens we are looking out for a secretary—someone who could hold his own with our clients, and impress them with the dignity of the 'Imperial' better than a plain man of business like myself. In short, I am commissioned, under certain circumstances, Sir Royal, to offer you the post."

Sir Royal opened his eyes.

"Are you aware that I know nothing whatever of business—that I do not even understand of what the secretary's duties would consist?"

"They are simple enough. There are dozens of young men who would be glad to jump at the post, Sir Royal, but I've been instructed to offer it to you, and—"

Reduced to plain facts, Mr. Eagle's statement convinced Sir Royal that the Imperial Insurance Company did require a secretary, and that to secure a gentleman of good birth they were willing to pay a fair salary.

They had found that second-rate men frightened doubtful clients. In a word, they wanted someone patient enough to put up with the stupidity of people who required a thing explained a dozen times over, clever enough to guard the interests of the company, and with sufficiently attractive manners to make the ordeal of the preliminary interview as little dreaded as possible.

The directors were sensible and shrewd. They had decided what they wanted was a gentleman. The real responsibility of the "passing" of candidates rested with the doctor. The accounts were in the hands of a staff of clerks. In a word, what the company needed in their secretary was manners, and whichever director had suggested Sir Royal as a suitable man knew what he was about.

Five hundred a year for very light duties. The hours of attendance at the office from ten to four, with a month's holiday in the year, and half-time on Saturday. It seemed to Sir Royal a far better appointment than anything he had thought of in his troubled reflections last night; but one thing puzzled him. Why had he been selected for the office.

"I have been reading the list of your directors, Mr. Eagles," he said, quietly,

"and I must tell you frankly I do not know one of them. I will go even further, and confess I do not boast a single business man among my acquaintances. I cannot for the life of me make out why I was recommended to your notice."

The self-made man smiled,

"And I'm not going to explain the riddle to you, sir. The party told me they believed you'd be obliged to exert yourself, and that this post would suit you. I told the party the interests of the company must be consulted first. But I'm bound to confess, Sir Royal, you look cut out for the post, and if you like to accept it it's yours."

"I accept it gratefully, and I will do my best to deserve your confidence, Mr. Eagles. I only hope you will be satisfied, and let the appointment be permanent."

"It'll never be that. Why, bless me, Sir Royal, you'll be marrying an heiress, and throwing us over before a year's gone. See if you don't."

"I am not given to offering confidences," said Royal, gravely, remembering poor Reginald's bugbear, "but I should like to tell you one thing. I am not a marrying man."

Mr. Eagles chuckled amiably.

"They all say that," he replied, good-temperedly. "Bless me, when Mr. Osborne first came to Everton he used to put it in nearly every sermon, as 'one given up to celibacy,' as one 'free from all family ties.' He used to begin all his appeals like that, but for the last three months he hasn't dropped a word about celibacy, doesn't even remind us he's a bachelor—and it'll be the same with you, Sir Royal."

Sir Royal smiled, but vouchsafed no other answer. He was thinking in his own mind that Rex need not despair. His devotion to Maria could not have escaped such lynx eyes as her papa's, and if Mr. Eagles had objected to the curate as a future son-in-law he would have said so plainly without beating about the bush.

CHAPTER II.

Six months passed by, and the nine days' wonder caused by Sir Hector Clinton's will was well-nigh forgotten. Even sympathetic Lady Dashwood had left off saying "poor Royal" when she mentioned the young Baronet, for it was impossible to go on pitying a man who always appeared in the best of spirits, and who never seemed in the least afflicted by the pangs of poverty.

It caused quite a sensation in society when it was known that Sir Royal had been appointed secretary to the Imperial Insurance Company. The first report was that he would not stay there a week, the second that he must be in love, and had taken the post as a stepping-stone to matrimony; but when time rolled on, and when the great world came back from their foreign tour or seaside sojourn, they found Sir Royal still at his post, and presently they discovered that his spending six hours a day in a city office by no means spoilt him for lighter employment.

He was still a most amusing guest for dinner-party or dance. He could still prove himself most effective at an evening "at home."

There was nothing forlorn, depressed, or subdued about him. He held his head as erectly as though he had possessed ten thousand a year, and seemed as cheerful as in the old days when he was his cousin's acknowledged heir.

And so society left off pitying him, and, quietly ignoring his employment, welcomed him as enthusiastically as ever.

It was an understood thing it was useless to invite Sir Royal to lunch or to any other festivity in the early part of the day. He,

himself, would have said point-blank he could not leave the city; but his fair hostesses never gave him the necessity. They carefully avoided the subject of his morning occupations, and though they warned their daughters he was a detrimental, few men were more popular than the impecunious Baronet.

It was the week before Christmas, which fell that year upon a Tuesday, and Sir Royal sat at breakfast enjoying his newspaper, when a notice in the first column caught his eye, which, in spite of all that had come and gone, gave him a distinct pang.

"On the 17th instant, at St. George's, Darchester, Jermyn Fokes, Esquire, of Darchester Castle and Portman-square, to the Honourable Rosa Adeline, fifth daughter of Lord Orme."

He put the paper down with a jerk. No one had ever told him of Rosa's engagement. It did not take him by surprise that she should be married; but such a marriage!

Lady Orme must surely have been in despair over her seven spinster daughters when she allowed the fairest of the group to marry a man of fifty turned, who had made his money in some mysterious business connected with tallow, and was popularly known as Jeremiah Fox before his wealth and ambition to enter society made him think of giving a fashionable variation to his name, and signing himself Jermyn Fokes!

Sir Royal had met him once or twice—a small, under-sized man, with a dried-up skin and wizened-looking face, and now he was the husband of the loveliest girl in London.

"Well," decided the young Baronet, sadly, "perhaps on the whole he is the one to be pitied most. He will honestly give her all she marries for—wealth, luxury, and ease, while she only takes him as a necessary encumbrance to his fortune."

He had known from the first Miss Orme's decision was final. He had, indeed, realised her falseness too thoroughly to wish to resume their engagement, and yet the consciousness she was another's gave him a pang.

He had been thinking lately if only she had been true to him eight hundred a year would have formed a sufficient income for them to begin housekeeping on.

Somehow of late Sir Royal had lost all his taste for gaiety. He was beginning to feel he should like to settle down and have a home of his own, only all women were false.

He was at the office before the clock struck ten. His punctuality was a standing marvel to Mr. Eagles, who never ceased to congratulate himself upon his choice of a secretary.

It so happened that as he was passing into his own room the door of Mr. Eagles' private sanctum, which was just opposite, opened, and the self-made man came out with a lady on his arm.

Sir Royal's first surmise told him it was Miss Eagles, and he decided the Reverend Richard Osborne would have a very charming wife; but the next moment he felt he must be mistaken.

The contrast between the two was too strong for them to be father and daughter.

Thomas Eagles was the picture of a prosperous tradesman. He did not drop his h's or make alarming grammatical errors, but his honest rosy face, his glossy hat, even the set of his clothes, and the tie of his scarf, had a middle-class air.

The girl on his arm, on the contrary, had that nameless stamp which breeding and birth can alone imprint.

She was very simply dressed in a long

fur-trimmed mantle, and a small black hat, but the hand which rested on Mr. Eagles' arm was small and beautifully shaped.

The voice in which she spoke to him was clear and refined, though Sir Royal could only catch a few words of the most matter-of-fact description.

"Yes, I think it will be fine. I shall try to catch the three o'clock train."

They passed Royal face to face, and Mr. Eagles nodded cheerfully, but did not introduce the young secretary to the lady.

This, of course, was perfectly correct, but it displeased Royal.

Mr. Eagles did not generally study etiquette; perhaps the stranger was his daughter, after all, and he did not care for her to be acquainted with one of his paid employes.

Honest Tom Eagles would have laughed heartily at such an idea, for though he did put a certain value on money he was neither purse-proud nor pretentious.

As it was he did notice, when he had a business conversation with Sir Royal later in the day, that the young secretary was decidedly dull.

"I don't think work agrees with you, Sir Royal," the managing director remarked, good-temperedly. "You look quite fagged."

"It's not from hard work, if I do," returned Royal, lightly. "The fact is, Mr. Eagles, I have a headache."

"Perhaps you stick to London too closely," suggested Mr. Eagles. "Why don't you go away a-bit? You could manage a mouthful of country air well enough from Saturday to Monday."

"I don't think the country is very pleasant alone," remarked Royal; "especially in winter."

"Well, you shouldn't go alone. You'd better visit your friends. I suppose you are engaged up to your eyes with invitations, or I'd ask you to run down to Everton, and eat your roast beef with us on Christmas Day. It's a nice little place enough, only a drive out of Chelmsford. You've only to say the word, Sir Royal, and I'll tell Mrs. E. to expect you on Christmas Eve. Why, I've heard you say young Osborne is one of your oldest friends, and he'll be with us to a certainty; in fact, there are few days now when we don't see something of him. If ever you're a family man, Sir Royal, you'll understand what that means. The curate thinks I'm blind, but I can put two and two together as well as most people, and I know pretty well that it isn't me Mr. Osborne comes to see. No, nor Mrs. E. either. Well, Sir Royal, is it a bargain? Will you come and spend your Christmas at the Lodge?"

"I should like to," said Royal, frankly, "only Mrs. Eagles may not care for a stranger quartered on her at such a time."

"Mrs. E. likes what I like," was the prompt reply, "and our motto's always been, 'the more the merrier,' though we haven't carried it out very well, seeing Maria is an only child, more's the pity."

"Was that Miss Eagles I saw you with this morning?" inquired Sir Royal, his curiosity getting the better of him.

"No, it wasn't, or I should have introduced you. Molly would have liked to know a friend of Mr. Osborne's, I'll be bound. As to that poor child you saw this morning, she's a mystery. I don't hold with mysteries, as a rule, neither does Mrs. E., but we're both fond of the girl, and so we put up with it."

"She is very beautiful."

"She can't hold a candle to my Maria," replied Mr. Eagles. "Not but that Nurse Nancy has a pretty face of her own, and would be worth looking at if she didn't try

to make herself ugly by wearing a white cap and black bonnet."

It came on Sir Royal then that the plain black bonnet he had thought so pliant and becoming was really part of the uniform of a hospital nurse.

"You can't possibly mean that that young lady is a nurse? She doesn't look more than eighteen!"

"She's a nurse right enough," said Mr. Eagles, who thoroughly enjoyed the sound of his own voice. "Some three years ago, when our Maria was ill at the seaside, Mrs. E. knocked up, and I had to get down a professional nurse. I'm sure I dreaded it; but when this girl came, and proved just the greatest comfort to us, we all took such a fancy to her that, when Maria got well, I told Nurse Nancy I'd gladly adopt her as a second daughter. However, she wouldn't hear of it, said she'd work to do, and the rest of it, so we parted with the understanding there was always a home for her at the Lodge whenever she cared to claim it."

"And she has claimed it now."

"Not exactly. For two years we heard nothing about her, and Mrs. E., getting fidgetty, when I was in town I called at the nurses' home, and asked the superintendent for Nurse Nancy. She told me she did not know where she was. A few months after she returned from nursing Maria a disreputable-looking, broken-down man (it's the superintendent's description, not mine) came to the home, and said Nurse Nancy was his daughter, and she had deserted him. He came so often that he quite upset the poor girl, and, of course, she couldn't give her mind to the cases; so the end of it was she left the Home, and I believe some relations of his came forward and advanced a sum of money for her to take him abroad. I went home to the Lodge, and told my wife we had seen the last of Nurse Nancy."

"How in the world did you find her again?" asked Sir Royal, with great interest.

"I'm coming to that. Last June I had a letter from Nurse Nancy, saying she was in great trouble, and asking me to meet her at the Charing-cross Hotel. I put my cheque book in my pocket, for I could never forget she had saved my girl's life, and I went to meet her. I soon found out her trouble wasn't money. A connection had died and left her as much of that as she could spend, but there was a favour she asked of me, which it happened I was able to do, and she promised me in return to come to the Lodge before the year was out. She came to us quite unexpectedly last week, and I assure you we're all delighted."

"But why do you call her a mystery?"

"Because she is."

"But—"

"Well, she's a lady born, and yet when we first knew her she was just a paid nurse. Then the disreputable old father turning up, and her leaving the Home to look after him, and his family stumping up money to get rid of him. Don't you see anything mysterious in that?"

"No, I don't. Many poor women have objectionable relations. What is her name, by the way?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"Well, you see, we knew her first as 'Nurse Nancy,' and we never thought of asking what her surname was. Then, of course, when we heard what a wretched history she had, and how she had first become a nurse to hide herself from her father and her relations, why, of course, we couldn't be unfeeling enough to ask her name."

Sir Royal thought of good Samaritans,

and decided the Eagles must surely deserve that name.

"I just asked if her father was dead," continued Mr. Eagles, "because you see I thought I could help her better if I knew, and she told me he only lived a few months after she left the Home."

"And is she nursing still?"

"Part of the year; but, as I told you, she came into a nice little legacy, and has no need to work; but you'll meet her at the Lodge. Your friend Mr. Osborne is delighted with her. He told Maria he should like to found a sisterhood at Everton, and have Nurse Nancy for the first mother superior!"

"That's nonsense," said Sir Royal, sharply. "A girl with a face like that has no business to shut herself up in a convent. She ought to marry."

Mr. Eagles smiled drily.

"I thought you did not approve of matrimony, Sir Royal?"

"I am not a marrying man."

"Ah! Well, Nurse Nancy is not a marrying woman, so you'll agree on one point, at any rate."

CHAPTER III.

THE Lodge was one of the handsomest mansions about Everton—rather too new, and just a little too bright, but replete with every comfort. In time to come, when years had faded and toned down the newness of the red brick, when creepers and ivy had covered some of the many gables that would look so obtrusively modern, when the young trees matured, and the gardens lost the air of having just only been laid out, why, then the lodge would have a far more imposing appearance, and be able to rank among the "places" of the neighbourhood; but at present it was simply the newest toy of a rich man, and bore on every side reminders of his wealth.

Mrs. Eagles was a lady, used in the limited West-end sense, not in the wider fashion of crowded courts and alleys, when a woman who takes in mangle complains that the "lady" next door undersells her labour. No; Helen Forrester was an officer's daughter, but he sold out before she was born, and, dying a few years after that event, left the child of his old age to be educated by charity, and earn her living as best she could.

The best was as under-teacher in a middle-class school, and here Mr. Eagles (calling to see the child of an old friend in India, to whom he had promised to write reports of her progress and well-being) met and fell in love with her.

He was then over forty—a shrewd, prosperous man of business. He conducted his courtship after a most prosaic fashion—called on Miss Garnet, and told her he wished to marry her junior teacher. He had no time for a long engagement; neither could such be carried on while Miss Forrester remained at Paragon House.

He had a good home ready for his wife, and could settle a comfortable income on her. Would Miss Garnet allow him a private interview with the young lady?

And, this being granted, he went to the point at once.

"You don't love me, my dear, and I am not the man to take a young girl's fancy; but if you can assure me you care for no one else I believe I can make you happy!"

They were married within a month, and the strangely-arranged union proved a complete success.

Helen never forgot the life of drudgery from which Thomas Eagles had rescued her. She knew he was not what the fastidious could call refined, but she also knew he had a heart of gold; and though (as Rex

Osborne had noticed) she did frown a little when he told the story of his start in life too often, she was really very fond of the self-made man, and had contrived to make him so happy that not even the fact that their only son breathed and died had been able to seriously disappoint him. After all, they had Maria; and, though she could never make a fortune in business, still, she could inherit the one her father had amassed, and the glories of the Lodge.

People who made their acquaintance after they settled at Everton always declared Mrs. Eagles was a sweet woman, and so ladylike. But not even the sharpest of those critics ever accused her of seeming to domineer over her husband, or from her conversation guessed that in point of birth she could have held her own with the oldest families around.

She never spoke of herself as apart from her husband.

She hid his little asperities of manner, and gloried openly in his good deeds; and perhaps the only proof that she remembered her superior birth was a desire hidden deep down in her heart that her only child might marry a gentleman.

"It'll be all right, Nell," her husband was saying to her the afternoon of Christmas Eve. "Royal Clinton's one of the nicest young fellows I ever met, and no more stuck-up than your favourite curate."

"I had much rather have visitors more of our own rank," she objected, gently. "Think of Maria."

"My dear Nell, whenever Maria marries young Osborne she is safe to meet Sir Royal Clinton, seeing the two are friends; so it is only facing the danger a little sooner."

Mrs. Eagles smiled. "I am so glad to hear you say that, Tom! Do you know, I thought—"

Mr. Eagles looked bewildered.

"What did you think, my dear?"

"I fancied you were bringing Sir Royal here because of Maria."

Her husband laughed.

"I am not quite blind, my dear Nell. Maria and Rex Osborne have contrived to lose their hearts to each other, and to take you into their confidence. Every time I see our curate I am expecting a request for a private interview; and I certainly should not invite Sir Royal here in the light of a son-in-law elect, since he has told me himself he is not a marrying man."

"I am so glad."

"That being settled, Nell, I hope you'll be nice to him. Just think of his ups and downs! A year ago heir to ten thousand a year, and engaged to the prettiest girl in London, now secretary in an insurance company, and—jilted."

"Do you know Mr. Fokes and his bride are coming to Darchester Castle for Christmas?" asked his wife, who, as the Castle was only a few miles drive, had naturally heard plenty of its owners.

"No! Why, they've only been married a week. He must be getting tired of her."

"I think the Ormes could not know what he is, or they would never have consented."

Mr. Eagles shrugged his shoulders.

"Orme is pretty hard up, though he is a lord. And when mothers have seven daughters to get off they are not so careful as you are with your one girl."

Mrs. Eagles hesitated.

"I wonder if Sir Royal knows how near we are to Darchester Castle?"

"It doesn't matter. He will only stay a few days, and you can't be troubled with the bride until you have called on her and left cards," said Tom, who had studied etiquette rather carefully when he built the Lodge and settled down as a country gentleman.

Sir Royal, meanwhile, was rather regretting his acceptance of the Eagles' invitation. He was feeling out of sorts. He had never stayed with any *nouveau riche*, and he reflected he might find his position exceedingly uncomfortable.

"Now, thank goodness, I'm a 'business man,' and can plead that as an excuse. The office will be open on Thursday, and though there will be nothing doing there this week I can plead Queen-street, if I find things very slow."

A dog cart met him at Chelmsford, drawn by a mare, whose pace considerably improved Sir Royal's opinion of his host's taste. He could not have wished for a finer animal himself.

"The master meant to come and meet you himself, Sir Royal," said the groom, civilly, "but someone came to see him, and he got detained."

The hall was perfectly ablaze with gas when the door was opened. The substantial-looking butler took Sir Royal's coat and hat, and marshalled him to the drawing-room, saying,—

"Mrs. Eagles is in here."

Sir Royal found himself in a lofty room, running the whole length of the house, glass doors at the further end opening on to a large conservatory. A very graceful-looking woman, in a quiet, grey cashmere, received him as cordially as though he was an old friend.

"I am very pleased to see you, Sir Royal. They have dragged my husband out to look at the ice, and report whether it will bear; but he will be in directly. Let me introduce you to my daughter, Maria, and Nurse Nancy, a great friend of ours."

Royal decided that Maria was like her mother, only not so pretty. As for Nurse Nancy, she looked even more charming than she had done last week in Queen-street; but he quite agreed with Mr. Eagles it was a mistake for her to wear a cap.

Still the cap was small, and revealed plenty of her chestnut hair, which was combed up high and coiled round her head, being brushed in smooth bands in front, like a widow's; and then Royal laughed at the idea—it was so absurd.

Her dress was a plain, black cashmere, made in princess form, and fitted her to a nicety. Her large blue eyes fixed themselves on the stranger intently, almost as though she had heard of him before, and wondered if he answered to the description.

Mrs. Eagles and Maria both seemed fond of her. They petted her in friendly fashion, and when she had left the room, his hostess said, half apologetically, to Royal,—

"I always feel so sorry for her. She looks such a child to be alone in the world."

"She is twenty-four," put in Maria. "It is her birthday to-day, I do wish I had known it before."

"She is so very pretty," said Sir Royal, slowly. "Is she making a long stay with you?"

"I hope so," replied Mrs. Eagles; "we are all fond of her. I hope you have no prejudice against nurses, Sir Royal?"

"I never met one before," he answered, simply; "but if they are all like her I should think they would be a great addition to society."

He was wondering a little whether she would leave off the cap when she dressed for dinner. Several guests were expected, and surely she would not wear it among strangers.

Mrs. Eagles was troubled with the same doubts, and she knocked at her friend's door on her way downstairs to solve them. She would welcome Nancy even with a cap; but oh! how she wished it might be dispensed with.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," she exclaimed when she entered the room and caught sight of Nancy. "Have you any idea how lovely you look?"

Nancy was standing by the table ready dressed. She wore a black velvet gown, very plainly made, and falling in a long train behind. The bodice was cut square, and edged with soft white crepe—the only sign save her jet ornaments that she was in mourning. Her sleeves ended at the elbow, showing her round, white arms. Her beautiful hair was plaited round in a coronal, and a few white rosebuds were fastened in its coils!

"You look like a princess," said Maria, fondly. "Nancy, I never saw you so beautiful. I am so glad you have left off that hateful cap."

"It would hardly be fair to your father and mother to appear among their guests in uniform," said Nurse Nancy, quietly; "and there is another thing, Molly, I want you to manage for me. If Mrs. Eagles should introduce me to anyone, my name is Brown. She may not like to say Nurse Nancy in such a large party."

Molly—as Maria liked best to be called—was conscious of a thrill of disappointment. Often had she pondered over her friend's strange history, and wondered what was her real name; but Brown, it was simply hateful.

She would far rather have kept to Nurse Nancy.

Now, though Miss Brown had been at the Lodge nearly a week, she had not met any of the Eagles' friends, except Mr. Osborne and Sir Royal Clinton.

The servants had been directed to speak of her as "Miss Nancy," and so had nothing to unlearn.

She gathered up the train of her velvet gown, and followed Maria downstairs, feeling a little as though she were going to make her appearance in a new world.

Only Mr. and Mrs. Eagles were in the drawing-room; but the first carriage could be heard driving up to the door.

"Papa," said Maria, simply, "Nancy is going to leave her profession behind her for Christmas. You see she has taken off her cap, and we are to call her Miss Brown."

Sir Royal, in right of his rank, took Mrs. Eagles in to dine, and Miss Brown fell to the lot of Rex Osborne, who had been duly instructed by Maria how to address her.

It was a large party, and *l'été d'hiver* flourished, so that the curate could say, unnoticed,—

"Then Molly has got her way. You are really going back to the world?"

"I don't think I ever left it."

"But you are going to drop your profession?"

Miss Brown turned one of the bracelets on her arm before she answered.

"I could not persuade Mrs. Eagles to let me stay upstairs to-night, and it seemed to me incongruous to appear here in my uniform."

"Molly would have been broken-hearted at your staying upstairs. What a number of people there are."

"And one of them is your particular friend. Sir Royal doesn't look very like a disappointed victim, does he?"

"No; and yet it must be a sad anniversary for him. Last Christmas Eve he was entertaining a party of guests at Redbourne as his cousin's representative, his plighted wife among them. No one dreamed then that within a month Sir Hector would be married, and Sir Royal jilted."

"What has become of her?" asked Miss Brown. "No one ever hears anything of her."

"Who?" returned Rex, not understanding in the least.

"Sir Hector's widow—Lady Clinton."

"I have not the slightest idea."

"Perhaps she is keeping open house at Redbourne this Christmas-Eve."

"Oh, no! Redbourne is shut up. Lady Clinton has never even set foot in the house. She instructed Mr. Carrington to have the place kept up exactly as it was in her husband's lifetime, and to deduct the cost from her income before paying it into the bank."

"How strange. Do you know her?"

"Oh, dear no. Mr. Carrington's son and I were schoolfellows; and, knowing my friendship for Royal Clinton, he thought I should like to hear the old place was not going to ruin."

"I see. Have you ever been there?"

"I often spent my holidays at Redbourne as a boy. I think it is the loveliest place I ever saw. I can't imagine how Lady Clinton can stay away from it."

"Perhaps she has never seen it."

"She probably married for it."

"And you are a clergyman," reproved Miss Brown, severely. "You don't seem very charitable, Mr. Osborne."

"It was an unjust speech, but you see I knew Sir Hector Clinton intimately."

"I don't see what that has to do with it."

"Don't you? Well, he was fifty turned. He had a violent irascible temper, and a bitter, cynical manner. He suffered agonies from a constitutional disease, which prevented his enjoying life or society. In fact, he was never happy except in retirement."

"I have heard he was deformed."

"He was, though only slightly so. Now, Miss Brown, tell me. Here was this man, middle-aged, and sickly, of surly temper and harsh manners. What temptation could induce any woman half his age to marry him except money?"

"I think you put it very unfairly," said Miss Brown, gravely. "I once met someone who has seen Sir Hector and his wife. Her account is very different."

"Perhaps she was a relation of Lady Clinton, and so saw the affair with her eyes?"

"She was a nurse. She had no interest in Sir Hector or his marriage; but I should like to give you her opinion of it."

"I should like to hear it. Sir Hector gave me so many proofs of substantial kindness in my boyhood I should be glad to think more favourably of his conduct."

"It is nothing to me," returned Miss Brown "but I do love justice."

"Well, tell me your version."

"The version I have heard," she corrected gently. "Remember I do not vouch for it myself."

"I am all attention."

"Last Christmas Eve, while young Mr. Clinton was entertaining guests at Redbourne so pleasantly in his cousin's name, Sir Hector was alone in the south of France—ill, low-spirited and despondent, with not a creature about him except his valet. He was suddenly taken very much worse. The only English doctor in the town was sent for, and recommended his removal to a quiet home hospital for English patients, a few miles off. The friend whose opinion I am giving you was one of the nurses there. The woman who became Lady Clinton was the other."

"I begin to understand."

"No, you do not," interrupted Miss Brown. "Let me finish. Sir Hector took a great fancy to the girl, Miss Arnot (I daresay you have heard her name before). She had not long before lost her father. She was utterly alone in the world. He had, the doctor told him privately, but a few months to live. Why should he not have

the solace of Miss Arnot's care and companionship for the evening of his days? He was wronging no one. She would nurse other sick people if she did not nurse him. There was not a living creature of his kindred to keep watch over his sick bed. He was a man of chivalrous honour. Miss Arnot was young and—in his eyes—attractive. It seemed to him the better plan that before she entered on her task she should have at least the shelter of his name. He wished to return to England. He would not let her accompany him without the title of his wife."

Mr. Osborne stared.

"Are you sure?"

"I only know what Miss Williams—the other nurse—told me. Sir Hector proposed to Miss Arnot, and was refused. He tried again and she hesitated; finally she consulted her friend. As Lady Clinton alone could she soothe Hector's last hours, she took no one's place, gave no one pain by so doing. As for his property, at that time she believed it to be entailed. She never gave a thought to her chance of inheriting it. Sir Hector settled five hundred a-year on her, and they were married. You are Royal Clinton's friend, so you probably know the sort of letter he sent to his cousin. Sir Hector burnt it; but the letter did its work. He was so enraged at the cruel charge brought against his wife that he made the will which has since been a nine days' wonder in society."

"And Lady Clinton?"

Miss Brown shook her head.

"I have been told her firm resolve was never to take more than the sum allowed her by her settlements—five hundred a year; but no one has spoken to me of her for months. She seems quite to have dropped out of the world."

"She can't be dead?"

Miss Brown sighed.

"No, because death rarely comes to the unhappy; besides, in that case, Mr. Carrington would have heard of it, and Sir Royal would have been restored to his inheritance."

Mrs. Eagles made a move for the ladies to leave the table, and the conversation was interrupted. But it had left two distinct impressions on Rex Osborne's mind. One, Lady Clinton was more sinned against than sinning; the other, that Nurse Nancy had some sorrowful history of her own. He was certain of it from the very tone in which she had said "death rarely comes to the unhappy."

CHAPTER IV.

SIR ROYAL did not find it necessary to remind his host that he was a "business man," and to suggest that Queen-street could not get on without him after Boxing Day. For time passed all too pleasantly at the Lodge, and so far from regretting that he had accepted Mr. Eagles' invitation he enjoyed himself thoroughly, and was only sorry that the week slipped by so quickly.

"I like your friend very much," confided Maria Eagles to her lover on the last night of Sir Royal's stay. "And, do you know, I don't think he is at all a broken-hearted lover. He seems able to hear Mrs. Fokes's name with perfect equanimity."

"He has got over his infatuation," agreed Rex; "but, all the same, her falseness has spoilt his life. Royal will never believe in a woman again."

"I don't know," said Maria, gravely. "I think he will. I fancy he is one of those whose heart will be caught in the rebound."

"He told me himself he should never trust his happiness to a woman again," replied the curate. "Besides, Molly, don't you

see the only person he cares to talk to here is Miss Brown, whose aversion to matrimony is as great as his own."

Molly smiled archly.

"I don't think, Rex, you will ever have that Sisterhood if Nancy is to be the Superior. I believe those two will agree so well in their renunciation of love and marriage that they will end by taking each other for better for worse."

Mr. Osborne shook his head.

"She is one of the nicest women I ever met; but she has a history, and I don't believe Royal would ever care for a woman whose past life was a mystery."

He might have changed his mind if he had gone into the conservatory, where Sir Royal had taken Nurse Nancy to admire Mrs. Eagles' camellias. The cap had never been resumed after Christmas Eve, and Miss Brown looked more girlish than ever in her soft black dress, some sprays of pale grey heliotrope its only ornament.

"I am going away to-morrow," began Sir Royal, rather abruptly. "Miss Brown, when shall you return to London?"

"In a few days."

"And you will let me come and see you. Don't you know how much I hope that we may be friends?"

Nancy looked into his face, with a strange wistfulness on her own.

"This has been a very pleasant week," she said, gravely. "But now that it is over we must just say 'good-bye,' and go our different ways. You and I can never be friends, Sir Royal?"

This calm declaration horrified Royal.

"Why not?" he asked eagerly. "You have not seemed to dislike me, and surely you won't refuse my acquaintance because I am in business?"

Nancy smiled.

"I hate idle people," she answered.

"Well, I shall be living in London, and I heard you tell Mrs. Eagles yesterday you were going there too. Why can't we see each other sometimes, and be friends? If you are living with relations surely they won't refuse to let you have people to see you now and then. Or if you are going to a hospital I will promise only to come on visiting days."

"You mean very kindly," returned Miss Brown. "But you don't understand."

"Then make me understand," he continued. "Why may I not see you?"

"Because between my world and yours a great gulf yawns, and it is not wise to try to bridge it over."

"I don't see any gulf."

"You belong to the upper ten thousand. Your friends are among the aristocracy. Though just now you have gone into business, everyone knows it is only for a time, and that when the unfortunate woman Sir Hector married is removed you will return to your old place."

"Look here, Nurse Nancy," said Sir Royal, taking one of the little hands, and looking fearlessly into her face. "Have you ever known me to tell a falsehood?"

"No; but—"

"Then you are bound to believe me now. I have 'gone into business' of my own free will, and I shall remain there all my life. I am not a very noble character, I daresay, but I am not mean enough to sit down and wish for a woman's death just because she happens to stand between me and wealth. Let Lady Clinton keep Redbourne till she is a hundred—but give me your friendship."

Nancy shook her head.

"You don't know anything about me!" she observed, quietly. "If you knew my history you might think me quite as objectionable as your cousin's widow."

Sir Royal grew desperate, and took the

plunge he had been deferring only because he feared to lose all by speaking too soon.

"My darling," he said eagerly, "don't you see I love you as my own soul? I should have told you so instead of asking for your friendship, only I feared you would think me presumptuous."

"It is only a fancy," returned Nurse Nancy, cheerfully. "Last year you were in love with Miss Orme, remember."

"And she killed my love at one blow by her treachery. Believe me, I could meet Mr. Fokes's bride to-morrow without one pang of envy. I know that I am a shockingly bad match, that I can give you none of the things I hoped once to provide for my wife; but, oh! my darling money is not everything. I have the whole love of my heart left, and that is yours, dear, if only you will accept it."

"Sir Royal," said Miss Brown, severely, "this is madness. Do you know it is only seven days since we first met?"

"I think I loved you the moment I saw you. Nancy, can't you give me any hope? My darling, is there anyone else?"

"No one in the world," she answered, promptly; "but all the same, for you to be engaged to me is impossible!"

"But why?"

"In the first place I think your affection is only a passing fancy."

"We will waive that, please," said Royal, passionately. "You are bound to accept my word. On my side I can conceive no difficulty except that you care for someone else, or think me too poor for you."

"I can give you plenty of other reasons. To begin with, you are very proud."

"I confess it; but then," and he smiled lightly, "I should be prouder of my wife than of ought else."

She shook her head.

"You are very proud. All your friends are rich and noble, while I do not know a single titled person, and my father—was a gambler."

"I have heard he was unfortunate," said Royal, tenderly, "and that you left a profession you loved to care for his last hours. It does you honour."

"We were the family black sheep," went on Nancy, desperately. "They actually paid him an allowance just to keep him out of England. They were respectable, you see, and did not want to be disgraced by such a connection. But when he was dead, and I could save the money up, I sent it back to them, every penny with interest, that they might not say he was a burden to them. My uncle and aunt belong to your world, Sir Royal. That is another reason why I can be nothing to you."

"I don't see it at all," returned Royal, promptly. "I will promise faithfully to forswear their acquaintance. I am ready to hate them from this moment if you will only tell me who they are."

"I washed my hands of them when I sent back the money. I told them I was going to be married, and they would never hear of me again."

"Well, won't you fulfil your threat? Nancy, two people can be very comfortable even on my income, and I believe I could make you happy."

She shook her head.

"You would get tired. I am not a fine lady, like Miss Orme—I mean Mrs. Fokes, and you would find it out."

"I am quite aware of the fact that you are not like Mrs. Fokes—and I am very glad of it. Nancy, don't you think you have tortured me enough? Can't you give me a little hope?"

"You will forget me," replied Nurse Nancy, composedly. "Some day I shall read of your marriage with an heiress, and

then you will be very grateful to me for saving you from your folly."

"You will have my ruin to answer for, Nancy; for, if you won't give me any hope I shall spend every minute of my time in trying to find you, and that will lose me my situation at the Imperial."

"And it would be unfair to good, kind Mr. Eagles. For his sake, Sir Royal, I will make a bargain with you. If you keep in your present mind for six months you may write to me. On the first of July I will call at the Richmond post-office and ask if there is a letter for Miss Nancy Brown. If there is I will answer it, and give you my address."

"Richmond. You are going there?"

"I shall not set foot in Richmond till the first of July, and I don't expect to find the letter. You will have learned by that time to forget this folly."

"I think not."

"We shall see."

"And you promise me," he laid a stress on the third word, "you will then give me your address, and let me plead my cause again?"

"I promise."

"And if you meet someone else and marry him in the meanwhile you will write and let me know?"

"Assuredly."

CHAPTER V.

IT was summer time. Sir Hector Clinton had been dead more than twelve months, when a lady alighted at Richmond station, and drove to some very pleasant apartments that had been chosen for her. It was Nurse Nancy.

The time of probation had come and gone.

This was the second of July, and she was going to the post-office presently to see whether Sir Royal's folly had continued, or if it had melted like the winter snow.

When she made that strange compact she had forgotten to consult her almanac. The first of July fell on a Sunday, and so, perforce, she had to postpone her journey of inquiry to the Richmond Post Office.

She had taken the apartments for a week, for she intended to have a month's holiday from her nursing duties, and she felt as though, whatever was the end of her compact with Sir Royal, she would like to be alone for a few days before she accepted Mrs. Eagles' pressing invitation to pay a visit to the Lodge.

She wore her uniform—the plain black dress and cottage straw bonnet, with its floating veil of black gossamer—and she looked quite as young and pretty as she had done on Christmas Eve.

"Of course he has forgotten," she told herself when, after she had unpacked and taken a cup of tea (she found she could not swallow any solid food), she started for the post-office. "It was only a moment's folly."

She could recall every word he had said to her. She knew that he had loved her when he asked her to be his wife; but had the love been only a passing fancy, or had it stood the test of six months' absence and silence?

She knew from a remark in Molly's last letter that Sir Royal was still secretary to the Imperial Insurance Company. Miss Eagles also mentioned that he had also given up his West-end chambers, and taken a very pretty little house at Sydenham, over whose furnishing he had consulted her mother.

"He is so bright and cheerful," ran the letter. "Papa declares he must be going to be married, but he never seems to pay much attention to any lady he meets here; and he told mamma he had got tired of

fashionable life, and had not been out at all in town this season."

"It sounds as though he were constant," thought Miss Brown; "but I shall soon know."

She stood in front of the counter, and asked for her letter. Her heart beat rapidly as she waited; but very soon a thick cream-laid envelope, with the monogram R. C., was handed to her. She had no time to read it, for as she passed out of the office she met Sir Royal face to face.

"You have come at last!"

"At last," repeated Nurse Nancy, indignantly. "It is only the second of July, the first fell on a Sunday."

"I came down on Saturday," said Sir Royal, walking beside her as a matter of course. "I told Mr. Eagles I would try and get back on Tuesday. Where are you staying?"

"Here," said Miss Brown, as they passed a pretty ivy-covered cottage. "Were you coming to call on me? Isn't it a trifle late for a visit of ceremony?"

"My visit is not of ceremony," retorted Sir Royal, "and I should call if it were ten o'clock."

"The landlady will think you perform your social duties at strange times."

"No, she won't. She knows me well. It is a strange coincidence, Nancy, that you should have taken these apartments, for the landlady is my old nurse!"

Mrs. Bond's face of welcome when she opened the door fully confirmed his words.

"Why, dear me, Sir Royal, this is a pleasure. Have you come to stay?"

"Not this time, Martha," said the young man, cheerfully. "I must return to London to-night, but I want to commend this lady to your special care. She is my future wife!"

"How could you?" asked Nancy, indignantly, when they were safe in the shelter of her own sitting-room.

"Well, you know you promised I should plead my cause, and you are too true a woman, Nancy, to have kept me in suspense for six months if you really meant to throw me over after all."

"But—"

"I will listen to any number of buts when once you have confessed one fact—we are engaged to each other."

He had taken something from his pocket, and before Nancy could remonstrate effectively was trying it on her finger—a hoop of beautiful pearls.

"It was my mother's," he said, reverently. "and has been laid away among my treasures since she died. And now, Nancy, tell me when I may replace it by a plain gold one?"

But Nurse Nancy asserted herself now.

"I can't be married for ages," she said, gravely; "and I expect, when you hear all I have to tell you, you won't marry me at all."

"I told you I am not in the least afraid of any disclosure, Nancy."

"To begin with. My uncle and aunt, whom I told you about."

"I am quite prepared to hate them, and I promise solemnly to renounce their acquaintance even if they should be my dearest friends."

"They were more than friends to you once. My uncle, my mother's only brother, was Lord Orme!"

"Well, I never liked Lord and Lady Orme, even in the days when I was engaged to their daughter. And they dropped my acquaintance when she jilted me, so I don't think your objection to them will be any difficulty."

Nancy looked at him wistfully.

"She was very beautiful, wasn't she?"

"Who, dear?"

"My Cousin, Rosa Orme."

"She was the belle of the London season, but she couldn't compare to you. Surely, Nancy, my darling, you are not afraid of my ever regretting her?"

"Are you quite sure you have conquered your old love for her?"

"I am positive. She was dead to me from the moment she jilted me. I would not marry Rosa Orme if she were a widow to-morrow."

"Then you believe in second love?"

Royal answered frankly,—

"I believe in my love for you. I should trust you, Nancy, even though you had once cared for someone else; but I hope I have the first place in your heart."

"I never loved anyone else, but—"

"But you were once engaged to someone else. Never mind, my darling, since you parted and he left you free!"

"But we did not part. I married him."

"Nancy!"

"It is quite true. I told you when you had heard everything you would despise me."

"I don't despise you. I daresay he was a brute, and his cruelty forced you to leave him; but, oh, my darling, don't you see what this means? We can never be aught to each other. Even friendship is forbidden us. You don't know how harshly the world judges a woman separated from her husband."

"But it's not my fault," pleaded Nancy. "Indeed, Royal, I did my utmost. The doctors told me my nursing had prolonged his life, and he died, blessing me with his last breath."

Royal bestowed an affectionate little shake upon his fiancée.

"You heartless child, making me so miserable when he is dead. But why do you call yourself Miss Brown?"

"Because his relatives objected to his marrying me, and I did not want to meet any of them. You see, he was years older than I, and I knew from the first nothing could save him; but he wanted me to be with him to the end, and there seemed to us to be no other way."

Royal understood. The dead man, in his chivalrous regard for Nancy, had given her his name lest the slightest shadow of blame should rest upon her; and she, after caring for him to the end, had gone back to her life as a hospital nurse, profiting nothing by her sacrifice.

"I understand. When did he die, dear?"

"More than a year ago. I never loved him, Royal; but he was so good to me, and I was fond of him as I might have been of my father had he been kind to me. When my husband died I felt as though I had lost a dear friend; but not that I was a widow!"

"And that is why you would not listen to me last December?"

"Partly. It seemed a slight to him; besides, I thought your affection was only a passing fancy."

"You know better now. And you are willing to trust yourself to me?"

"More than willing. Only Royal, I am a terrible megalomaniac for you, for you are not only proposing to marry Lord Orme's poor relation, but the designing adventuress who coaxed a man old enough to be her father into marrying her."

They were his very own words, quoted from his last indignant letter to Sir Hector; but he never recognised them. He never saw the similarity between Nancy's story and that of his cousin's widow.

"Sweetheart!" he answered, fondly, "I could carry a far heavier burden for your sake. Do you know at this moment I am actually grateful to Miss Orme for jilting

me? I can even forgive Lady Clinton for depriving me of Redbourne, since it left me free till I met you."

"You won't tell anyone?" she entreated, when at last he rose to go.

"I shall tell everyone I know," he answered, promptly, "so that I may have plenty of witnesses against you if you change your mind; and I have been thinking, Nancy, I should like us to be married at Everton. I am sure Mr. Eagles would like to act the part of your father at our wedding; and, somehow, I should feel as if there was a flaw in the marriage ceremony if anyone but dear old Rex read the service."

"Mr. Osborne won't approve of our engagement. He thought me suited for a Sister of Mercy."

"A great mistake on his part. Nancy, I am to have a month's holiday in August. Don't you think we could be married soon? You won't want to wait for ages while you make your trousseau. I would much rather you came to me in your cap and uniform than that."

CHAPTER VI., AND LAST.

It was three days after Sir Royal's engagement, and on leaving the offices in Queen-street he had gone straight to the Temple. He wanted not only to tell Mr. Carrington of his happiness, but to ask that gentleman to draw up his marriage settlements.

Probably, Royal would be the slenderest provided for Lady Clinton on record; but at least he could secure for her use the three hundred a-year he had inherited from his mother.

Mr. Carrington's greeting took him by surprise.

"I have been expecting you all day. I telegraphed to you the moment I got here this morning."

"Well, I never had your message. It must have got to Sydenham after I left. I looked in entirely on a matter of private business."

"Well, Sir Royal, the news I have for you is so important that I must ask you to postpone your business until you have heard it. Please read this letter."

He handed Royal a small sheet of note-paper, such as ladies use. Half of it was covered with a clear, distinct handwriting, and it was dated from Redbourne Hall.

"DEAR MR. CARRINGTON,—

"Although we have never met, my late husband had such confidence in your judgment that I have no scruples in asking you to assist me in rather a delicate matter."

"I am engaged to be married, and in the course of a few months my late husband's property will belong to his cousin, Sir Royal, in fact and law, as it has always appeared to me to do in right since Sir Hector's death."

"I have never in the last twelve months allowed my expenses to exceed the five hundred a-year I regard as legally mine. The balance of the income from the Redbourne property is still in the bank, and I am anxious to hand this over to Sir Royal before my wedding-day. I should feel very thankful if he would consent that there should be at least peace between us, and my great desire is that he will allow me an interview here during the short time the property remains nominally mine. If you can persuade Sir Royal to make any appointment this week or next it will be gratefully kept by

"Yours faithfully,

"ANNE CLINTON."

"Well," said Mr. Carrington, im-

patiently; "what do you say, Sir Royal? Has not fortune's wheel turned at last? Lady Clinton will have kept you out of your inheritance barely a year, and if you accept her offer of restoring you the income from the estates since Sir Hector's death you will not have lost a shilling."

But Royal could not feel enthusiastic.

"I am sure I wish she could keep it all," he said, simply. "I am very happy as it is. I don't want things altered."

"You are thinking this comes too late to restore your fiancée?"

"No, I am not," snapped Sir Royal. "I'm engaged to a woman ten times more beautiful than Miss Orme ever was. She hates riches and show, and the chances are, when she hears of this, she'll throw me over."

"I fancy not. Anyway, Sir Royal, you must take your rights. Perhaps I may be allowed to suggest it would be a graceful act of courtesy if you agreed to Lady Clinton's wish and called on her."

"I'll call," said Sir Royal, reluctantly. Then he added, "Perhaps next Saturday would suit?"

"The day after to-morrow?"

"Yes," said Sir Royal, who was going to meet his fiancée on the Monday and escort her to Everton. "I can't go next week. It will be rather a trying interview, but I don't want to bear malice; and if Lady Clinton means what she says she may like to hear from me that I have often congratulated myself on losing Redbourne, since at least it saved me from being married for my money."

He felt rather undecided as to telling Nancy of the changes in his fortune.

He rather leaned to the idea of keeping the revelation until she should be Lady Clinton.

Anyway, there was no need to say a word to her until after his interview with Sir Hector's widow.

He carefully examined a time-table, and then telegraphed four o'clock as the time of his arrival, deciding that he should be able to catch the six o'clock train back to London.

Little as he had cared before for his good fortune he did feel a thrill of pleasure as he saw Redbourne in all its glorious summer beauty, to think that Nancy would be mistress there.

He wondered if Lady Clinton would keep the title on her second marriage, or subside into plain Mrs. Blank. Probably the latter, as his own wedding would make her a dowager.

The butler opened the door, and exclaimed, at his lack of luggage,—

"My lady expected you to stay till Monday at least, Sir Royal. Your old rooms have been prepared."

It seemed to Royal the conventionalities would not have been pleased at his staying in the house alone with the young widow. Perhaps the butler guessed this, for he observed, gravely,—

"Some friends of Lady Clinton arrived last night, Sir Royal, but you will find her alone in the library."

He never quite forgot that moment.

He entered the familiar room, thinking to meet a stranger, and there came slowly towards him, dressed in soft, black velvet robes, the woman who had promised to be his wife—Nancy.

"Can you ever forgive me, Royal?"

"What for, my darling? And how in the world do you come to be Lady Clinton's guest?"

"Because you see I am Anne Clinton—and, Royal, I tried hard to tell you on Monday. I did so hope you would guess when I told you my husband was an old man, and his relatives called me an adventuress."

"Nancy!"

"And, Royal, I began a dozen letters to you; but, somehow, I could not explain, and then I wrote to Mr. Carrington, and asked him to send you here."

Then came a pause.

"Shall you throw me over?" asked Nancy, demurely. "You know I always said you would never marry me if you knew everything."

"I should like to marry you to-morrow," replied Sir Royal, "and then I should be quite sure you would not escape me."

They were married in the bright August days, when the sun was tanning the ripening corn to a bright golden tint.

And Sir Royal had his wish, for Mr. Eagles gave away the bride, and Rex Osborne performed the ceremony.

Lord and Lady Dashwood were invited guests, for the countess had called on Nancy, and persuaded her to make an exception of her dislike for fashionable people in their favour.

The Imperial Insurance Company lost its secretary, and the Nursing Home was deprived of one of its best members.

But there were great rejoicings at Redbourne that Sir Royal should have come to his own at last, and have found so sweet a wife.

There is a picture of young Lady Clinton in the gallery at the Hall, taken in her bridal robes, which people consider a masterpiece. But the likeness Sir Royal prefers of his wife is a small painting which hangs over the writing table in his study. It represents her in a plain black dress, with a little white cap over her beautiful hair—in a word, as he saw and loved her first, when he knew her only as NURSE NANCY!

[THE END.]

YOU.

If I could have my dearest wish fulfilled,
And take my choice of all earth's treasures, too,
And ask from Heaven whatsoever I willed,
I'd ask for You.

No man I'd envy, neither low nor high,
Nor king in castle old or palace new;
I'd hold Goleonda's mines less rich than I,
If I had You.

Toil and privation, poverty and care,
Undaunted I'd defy, nor future woo;
Having my wife, no jewels else I'd wear,
If she were You.

Little I'd care how lovely she might be,
How graced with every charm, how fond,
How true;
E'en though perfection, she'd be naught to me,
Were she not You.

There is more charm for my true loving heart
In everything you think, or say, or do,
Than all the joys of Heaven could ere impart
Because it's You.

EARTHQUAKES are not so uncommon in the British Isles as might be supposed. Out of the 6,831 earthquakes which had been recorded in the world from the earliest times up to 1850, the British Isles were responsible for no fewer than 255. The district of Comrie, in Perthshire, is the favourite resort of the earthquake, and in the winter of 1839, 140 earthquakes were experienced in this favourite locality. Both in England and Scotland the autumn is the commonest time for earthquakes. There have been 79 in autumn, 74 in winter, 44 in spring, and 58 in summer.

Society

THE King and Queen are expected to return to Marlborough House from Scotland on the morning of Sunday next, the 20th, and a day or two afterwards His Majesty will go to Sandringham. The King and Queen are to meet the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall when they arrive at Portsmouth on Saturday, November 2nd, and the whole Royal party will proceed to Sandringham on Monday, the 4th. There is to be a small shooting party at the Hall from Wednesday, November 6th, until Monday, the 11th, and the King's birthday will be celebrated in the customary manner on Saturday, the 9th.

AMONG the diversified experiences of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall during the Imperial tour, which is now reaching its final stages, none can have afforded them a larger measure of amused interest than the remarkable "pow-wow" of Canadian Red Indians at which they were welcomed near Calgary. Impressive, in its weird way, as was the demonstration of evidently sincere loyalty on the part of the fantastically garbed chiefs, the keen sense of humour which is shared by the Duke and Duchess must have been rather severely tried by the solemn antics and quaint addresses of "Crop-Eared Wolf," "Running Rabbit," "White Pup," and the rest, who seem to have offered a further temptation to untimely mirth by the droll contrast between their attempted assumption of an appropriately dignified demeanour and their somewhat colloquially-worded aspiration that they might be provided with "lots of grub." Fortunately, however, the Royal travellers proved equal to the strain on their gravity, and there can be no doubt that the "pow-wow" will have an excellent effect in cementing the loyalty of the Red remnant in the Dominion to the British Throne and Empire.

PRINCE Henry of Prussia has gone to Spala on a visit to the Czar and Czarina, with whom he intends to remain for several weeks. The strong likeness which exists between His Royal Highness and the Czar has often given rise to very amusing mistakes. It is a curious fact that such a resemblance should exist when it is considered that there is only a very distant relationship between the Prince and Nicholas II. The likeness is, however, there, and is still more striking than that which exists between the Czar and the Duke of York, who, after all, is his first cousin. The great-grandmother of Prince Henry of Prussia was a daughter of the Czar Paul, the Grand Duchess Marie-Paulowna of Saxo-Weimar, but otherwise there is no blood relationship between him and the Czar.

STILL the little difficulties with regard to the Coronation ceremony continue to crop up. Most people know that there is not only an Ushership of the Black Rod, but an Ushership of the Green Rod. Few, however, know that there is an Ushership of the White Rod. This is a post in the Royal Household of Scotland; and like every other post in that household, in modern times, it is a sinecure; not, however, an honorary one, since it is worth £400 a-year. Curiously enough, however, it is held by a Church, and not by an individual. At one time it was hereditary in the Midlothian family of the walkers, of Drumsheugh, and when the family became extinct their property, including the White Rod, went to the Scottish Episcopal Church.

Statistics

THE United States raises the largest amount of revenue by taxation of alcoholic drink (£39,968,000). Great Britain obtains the greater proportion of her revenue from this source, viz., 36 per cent., against 20 per cent. in America, and 10 and 18 per cent. in France and Germany respectively.

IN Great Britain beer is the staple drink; 31·7 gallons per head were consumed last year, and 32·7 per head in 1899, against 27·5 gallons in Germany, where much light beer is drunk: 13·8 gallons per head in the United States, and 6·2 gallons only per head in France. Yet even the beer-drinking power of Great Britain is not so great as that of Belgium, where 47 gallons per head were consumed in 1899, while in Bavaria the amount was so large as 54 gallons per head, but this probably is mostly lager.

FRANCE is the great wine drinking country of Europe.

OUR Colonies do not drink anything like so much beer as we do at home. In the matter of spirits, South Australia is the most thirsty colony, consuming 2·4 gallons per head.

Gems

TIME never sits heavily on us but when it is badly employed.

FOOLS create opportunities for wise men to take advantage of.

BEAUTY without kindness dies unenjoyed and undelighting.

THE making of a man's way comes only from that quickening of resolve which we call ambition. It is the spur that makes man struggle with destiny; it is Heaven's own incentive to make purpose great and achievement greater.

KEEP your heart full of generous emotions, and your head full of good thoughts; then in heart and head there will be found no room for evil. The heart and head being thus occupied, the words and acts will be generous and beneficent.

DON'T make any one feel self-conscious in your presence; it indicates that you are excessively self-conscious yourself. Be unconscious of yourself and that will make people unconscious of themselves when with you. Don't expect too much from other people.

The Influence of Kindness.

There are few people so fortunate that at some period of their lives they do not droop under the clouds of trouble or misfortune. At some time grief is almost certain to come, an unwelcome guest. Sorrows and troubles gather round us, causing our hearts to almost break beneath the weight. It is in those dark hours that the heart needs the comfort and kindness of a sympathizing friend. We are so constituted that, to a great degree, our happiness is dependent upon others. The heart is formed for friendships, and we need the smile and light glowing from the faces of others as much as the little flower needs the warmth of the sun or the cooling shower. Words of kindness fall upon the heart like the gentle dew. We know not, and may not know, the good we might do in this world by simple deeds of kindness. They are worth more than silver or gold. How like angels of mercy we might become if we would be guided more by the law of kindness—kindness to all, especially to the poor and to those who have strayed from the paths of rectitude! It is kindness alone that will soften their hearts and win them back eventually to the right way.

Gleanings

WE do not always learn from the mistakes of others, but we are always ready to profit by them.

A SMALL prayer-book was found in the stomach of an ostrich lately dissected in London.

WOMAN'S sphere, in spite of all that her apologists may say, is at the best but a hemisphere.

WOMAN'S visual memory is very defective, judging from the frequency with which she looks into a mirror.

THE progeny of a pair of rats, under favourable conditions, will in three years number about one thousand.

WHEN a man thinks one woman is different from other women it argues that he does not know either the one or the other.

DAVID WILSON, a moulder, gave full play to a yawn, and the result was a dislocated jaw. It was fully an hour before a physician succeeded in getting the jaw replaced.

Do those who are interested in the America Cup Race realise that "Shamrock's" mast is as high from the keel as the Nelson column in Trafalgar-square. Yet even the sails in which she "snow-swathes" herself are outdone in beauty by the burnished copper of her sides. When it was decided that paint made a little friction with the water and the green paint was scraped off, four days in dry dock were devoted to the polishing of her sides by many scores of hands. That turned her sides into burnished mirrors, of a colour better than that of gold; and the keel, beneath the hand of an English lady who stroked it, had, she said, the surface of a jewel.

SURELY one of the little ironies of life may be read between the lines of Lady Francis Cecil's forbidding of the banns between her son, Mr. Richard Cecil, and Miss Jessie Bain, of Glasgow. Nothing in the modern annals of that branch of the Cecil family has given it so much popular notoriety as the romantic marriage of Henry, tenth Earl of Exeter, Lord of Burleigh, with the "village maiden" of Tennyson's verse. The record of the mesalliance, which dates back just one hundred and ten years, is marked by a "Mr.," where every other commoner is esquired: "Married Sarah, daughter of Mr. Thomas Hoggins, of Bolas, Salop." Yet it was this Earl of Exeter who gained the Marquisate for his family; and whom, when the milk-maid died "before her time," a duchess was delighted to marry.

MR. JOHN PHILIP SOUSA, the famous American composer, who is conducting a series of entertainments in Great Britain with his famous military concert band of fifty-six performers, is probably the first American to gain popularity as a musician outside of the limits of his own country. It is now ten years since his "Washington Post" was produced, and set the feet of the world moving; and during that period his other productions have been many. Altogether he has written over three hundred published compositions, including seventy-five famous marches, six comic operas, and a considerable number of orchestral suites. Several books of instruction for various instruments and a compilation of the "National, Patriotic and Typical Airs of All Lands" also owe their authorship to him. In addition to being a musician, Mr. Sousa is also a keen sportsman. He is reputed to be an excellent trap-shot, and takes great delight in riding, cycling, golf, and tennis.

YOUNG widows are plentiful in Bengal. In that province there are 49,664 widows who are under ten years of age.

In four-fifths of the hotels and restaurants of Germany the waiters receive no pay, and are expected to live on their tips.

It is the belief of some of the Chinese that the women who wear short hair will be transformed into men in the future world.

THE smallest bird is the humming bird of Brazil. It is a little larger than the common honey bee, and weighs about five grains.

THE railroads of Holland are so carefully managed that the accidental deaths on them average only one a-year for the entire country.

A POT which cannot boil over has been invented by a Berlin machinist. It has a perforated rim, and the overflowing liquid returns to the utensil.

BEER in siphons is becoming popular in Germany. The siphons are of various sizes, and contain from fifteen to forty glasses. In these receptacles the beer continues fresh for two days.

SNAILS are used in Philadelphia to clean windows. The snail is dampened and placed upon the glass, where it at once moves around and devours all insects and foreign matter, leaving the pane as bright and clear as crystal.

WIRELESS TELEGRAPHY IN THE ARCTICS.—The conditions surrounding Arctic travel are such that the principal difficulty is found in maintaining communication with a base of supplies. It is believed that wireless telegraphy has now reached a point where, at least, it promises such development that future exploring parties will be able to carry along apparatus and keep constantly in touch with their base camps. If this proves to be the case, much of the terror of the Arctic will be removed, and exploration will be made both easier and safer, with the possibility that this added instrumentality will enable the discovery of the Pole at no far-distant date.

MANY people still smile when they hear travellers talk of oysters that grow on trees, just as, long ago, sailors were laughed at when they came home with stories of flying fish. Both are real enough, however, and of delicious tasting, as latter-day voyagers through the tropics well know. At a conference recently held in Barbadoes, an interesting proposal for increasing and improving the cultivation of tree-oysters was brought forward, and as there is a rich field in nearly all the West India Islands, and along the coast of Central America, something will no doubt come of the scheme. These oysters cling to the branches of the mangrove.

THE announcement from Canada that the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall have had to give up promiscuous hand-shaking, on the ground that though the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak, recalls an incident of Mr. Gladstone's memorable Midlothian tour. On one occasion there was a great hand-shaking ordeal at the window of the old gentleman's railway carriage, and he was rapidly getting the worst of it. A stalwart young policeman, who accompanied Mr. Gladstone, proved equal to the occasion. Crouching behind the great man, and thrusting his hand under Mr. Gladstone's Inverness cape, the muscular "peeler" gave each comer in turn a grip that had no lack of cordiality. "The auld man's uncommon vigorous at his time o' life," observed one unsuspecting Scot as he stroked his fingers. "He is that," concurred another of the policeman's victims, "but did ye notice his nails?"

IN Germany no less than a quarter of the total alcohol produced is used, not for human consumption, but for chemical purposes.

Even in spirit drinking, the United Kingdom does not stand first on the list. The quantity per head consumed in 1900 was 1'12 gallons only, against 2'02 gallons in France, 1'94 gallons in Germany, and 1'06 only in America (1899).

A MOST interesting memorial of the Roman occupation of England has just been sold under the auctioneer's hammer. This is the Roman station of Amboglanna, the largest on the famous wall which marked the limit of the Roman province. After an existence of 1,800 years the walls of the station, 5 feet thick, are in a wonderful state of preservation. The gateways are noble specimens of Roman work; some of the wedge-shaped stones used in the arches are still to be seen on the ground. The interior of the camp is marked with lines of streets and the ruins of buildings. The estate which claimed this ancient memorial of the past was sold for £8,000.

THE London County Council are erecting at Lowestoft, under the auspices of their Industrial and Reformatory Schools Committee, a Smack Boy's Home, which will be used for placing out in the smack service boys licensed from the Council's industrial schools at Feltham and Mayford. As far back as the year 1894 the Council leased some premises in the neighbourhood town of Gorleston for use as an agency for shipping the boys from their industrial schools on to the Yarmouth fishing smacks, but as in course of time the opening there became practically closed the agency was transferred to Lowestoft, where the boys have been temporarily accommodated pending the completion of the new buildings. There is a constant demand for boys for the Lowestoft smack service.

GREAT success has attended the distribution of allotments and small holdings in a certain part of Worcestershire. Men who formerly with their families toiled at making nails are now prosperous small farmers and market gardeners. It is the old story—the advent of machinery gradually ruined the hand-made nail industry. To eke out their diminishing income many of the nail-makers obtained allotments, and after a time they found that the spade was more profitable than the nail block. Glowing stories are told of families cultivating three or four acres each, and getting as much as £40 or £50 a-year out of an acre, and one allottee it is said gathered as much as forty dozen pounds of strawberries in one day and sold them at 4s. 6d. a dozen, thus receiving £20 for one day's pickings.

A WOMAN'S PRAYER.

Dear God, there is a single prayer
That I would pray of Thee;
It is not that I may not care
Where he may go from me—
My heart would seek and know him there,
Were he on land or sea.

It is not that I may forget
The tears mine eyes have shed;
I seek no surcease of regret
That I at last am dead.
I crave not peace of Thee, nor yet
That I be comforted.

That is my prayer, that giving so,
The gift imperative,
Bearing the bruises of the blow
Be struck while I shall live—
Spare me, oh, God! that he should know
That I can still forgive!

E. M. K.

WITHOUT A REFERENCE.

By the Author of "Diana's Diamonds," "The Gardener's Daughter," &c.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

At the age of two years Sylvia Paske, who is motherless, is taken by her father to the Convent of Rannee Bhini Tal, N. W. Province of India, where she remains for more than 15 years. Mr. Paske takes no interest in his daughter's welfare beyond seeing that the fees are regularly paid and once writing to the Sister Superior to say that if Sylvia is not prepared to take the veil she is to leave the Convent at 18. Sylvia, however, is not disposed to lead the life of a recluse. Conscious of her own powers she longs to take her place in the great world of man and woman. The day arrives when she has to say "good-bye" to her dear friends at the convent and goes to stay with Mr. and Mrs. Coek. Sylvia cannot agree with her new landlady, and determines at all costs to get to England. This she does as the maid of Mrs. Plimmer, who makes quite a confidante of her. At Malta she goes ashore, and, notwithstanding the evil reputation of some of the streets, finds herself surrounded by a gang of desperadoes, and is saved by the timely arrival of Roger Hyde. Sylvia discovers that it is a far from easy matter to obtain work in London without a friend, especially when she is robbed of the only paper that could have assisted her—a character from Mrs. Plimmer. She finds a companion in a poor girl, and together they manage to exist until one falls ill and their funds are exhausted. Then, as a flower girl, Sylvia meets Roger Hyde once more, and he, in a fit of despair at having to find a wife within a few days, proposes to and marries this penniless girl. Roger takes a furnished house at Twickenham for his wife and her friend Jessie, during his enforced absence at Malta. Bernard Hyde, stung to jealousy by the good fortune that has come to Roger, is striving with might and main to find some flaw in Roger's title to his uncle's fortune. In the meantime the failure of Sylvia to fully establish her identity is likely to prove an obstacle in the path of her husband, but she determines to make Mr. Paske reveal himself in his true colours, and, for this purpose, obtains a situation in his household as lady companion.

CHAPTER XXVII.—(continued.)

"H, adventures in the bush, and out after blacks and bush-rangers' adventures in bars and gambling halls. However," said Mr. Horne, "I won't mind them now. I'll tell you how the police caught a gang of robbers and murderers about ten years ago, not long before I came over."

"Please do, I like to hear of such wretches being brought to justice." How long would it be before she could see the law lay hands on her own particular wretches?

"Well, for a long time there had been complaints to the police that young men had come out from England with a good deal of money to start them, that they had got billets up-country, but were never heard of again. It became quite a scandal.

At last, when a young man, named Sayers, vanished after being only a fortnight in Melbourne, and his relations wrote out and made a desperate fuss; the authorities took it up, and put a first-class detective on called 'Sandy Sam,' and Sandy Sam told me all about it himself.

"He discovered that Sayers had landed, and gone to an hotel, that he had subsequently advertised, but had not received any answers. Little was known or remembered of him, save that he once stated that he was in search of employment. After a stay of a fortnight he had paid his bill and gone away. No one was known to have called on him; and although he was always writing and posting letters, he did not, as far as they know, receive any at his hotel.

"The pawnbrokers' shops were drawn blank for his watch, with maker's name and number. There was not a clue, though his friends had furnished a description of him:—

"'Ceoil Sayers, aged twenty-five, slight build, dark hair, blue eyes, dark moustache. Not heard of since arrival. Letters returned through post-office. Quiet, reserved, gentlemanly and steady. Come to Australia on account of family quarrel. Photograph sent.' But there was not the smallest clue to the missing man. The 'Wanted' column of the Argus was searched and the following advertisement caught the detective's eye:—

"'Wanted, a partner and companion for a young man on an up-country station. A young Englishman of good education and manners preferred. Capital not so much an object as congenial companionship. Must be able to ride. Not over thirty.—Apply, by letter, to A. B. C., 207, Collins-street."

"The detective remembered to have seen that notice in several times previously, and the last time, shortly before Sayer's disappearance, he determined to drop a line on chance to A. B. C., and see what would turn up. So he sat down and penned off an application for the situation, enclosing splendid bogus testimonials and references (Sara blushed with the blush of a similar sin), and saying that he was only just out from home, and most anxious to settle down up-country. I must tell you Sandy Sam was a quiet, gentlemanly young man, and hailed from Sydney, and was not personally known to gangs in Melbourne.

"The day after he wrote in answer to the advertisement he got a letter, asking him to call at a certain hotel, and ask for Mr. Brownlow. So he made himself up quite in the last 'new chum' style and went to the hotel at the prescribed hour, and sent up his card.

"Mr. Brownlow, a charming old gentleman, seemed delighted to meet Mr. Trewlawny—that was his name—was pleased with his letters of recommendation, and thought he stood a good chance of the place. He would certainly recommend him to his sister, Mrs. Talbot, with whom the decision rested. Next day he received a letter from Mrs. Talbot, saying she would be glad to see Mr. Trewlawny at Swansea Villa on Saturday, at dinner, and he accepted of course.

"He had told the old gentleman that momentary considerations were of no importance to him, and had talked somewhat 'big.' He found Mr. Brownlow at Swansea Villa, looking the benevolent old party all over, and was duly introduced to his hostess and her husband. There was a quiet little dinner of food, music, and smoking afterwards in the verandah.

"Mrs. Talbot was surprisingly young, and very pretty and fascinating. She engaged him for her brother-in-law, and offered, as she and her husband were going up country, to travel with him. Their carts could take his heavy baggage if he would bring it to the villa on Tuesday and dine with them quietly—then start by the night mail with Mr. Brownlow.

"Of course he accepted, and on Tuesday sent a cartful of 'dummy' boxes to Swansea Villa. Dinner was put back awaiting Mr. Brownlow, and when he arrived he was full of apologies. He had made them miss the mail! They must remain that night, and could give Mr. Trewlawny a shake-down, and they could catch the morning express.

"Of course it was all the same to Mr. Trewlawny! When the decanters were placed on the table, Mr. Brownlow, Mr. Talbot, and a young man named Starke, became excessively festive, and Mrs.

Talbot, withdraw with a bad headache. Trewlawny told stories, and pretended to punish the bottle very freely, and became first wildly excited, and then drunk-muddled, and talkative, and declared his intention of going up to bed. As he staggered upstairs, a door was gently opened, about two inches, and he saw a woman's white face, Mrs. Talbot's, regarding him with horror and pity. No sooner had he got into the room than he saw that the door had been tampered with. There was no bolt and no key.

"Shouting a drunken song, he took off his clothes and put on others, stuffing his evening suit into a figure, and laying it alongside the bed.

"He crept over and looked out of the window and at the garden, which ran down to the river—a dismal outlook, indeed!—a damp, desolate, weedy garden, that seemed like a graveyard, only the river was their grave, that and the greedy sharks.

"An hour passed, and he heard a creaking of the stairs, and the door opened softly and admitted two men, Brownlow and Talbot.

"'He's asleep,' whispered one, 'it's all right.'

"The man creeping across the room, was no other than the venerable Brownlow, and he carried a formidable knife in his hand.

"'A sell!' he cried, having plunged it into the dummy, and his hands felt the thing collapse in his grasp.

"At this moment Trewlawny sprang out, revolver in hand, and said,—

"'Drop that knife, or I'll shoot!'

"The man dropped it.

"Sandy Sam sounded a shrill whistle, and the call was answered by a great disturbance below. The front door was smashed in, and a woman's figure fled across the garden, several gave chase, but she was gone.

"It had been a great business while it lasted. About thirty new chums had been decoyed, murdered, and thrown to the sharks, and their belongings disposed of in Melbourne. Brownlow, Talbot, and Starke were hanged together. Mrs. Talbot (so called) was never heard of again. What do you say to that story? Don't I tell it well?"

"Splendidly. Do you think it really happened?"

"Why of course it did. Such things occur much oftener than you think."

"You mean," looking at him steadily, "murder and robbery?"

"Yes," dropping his eyes, and shifting his hands uneasily.

"And do you think people who commit these crimes are always found out?"

"Not they! No, nor half of them! Dead men tell no tales!"

"No, I suppose not. Well, Mr. Horne, I have had an interesting evening, and I must go. There is the stable clock striking. I dare not meet you in the grounds again. I should get into such trouble, and I cannot afford to lose my place."

"And I cannot afford to lose sight of you. Tell me when shall I see you again?"

"Next Thursday week is my 'day out.' If you like you might take me over to Dover for a couple of hours. I have never seen it."

"Capital! and we will lunch there, and do the band. No one knows me, no one knows you. Put on your best frock, and I'll meet you at Walmer station at twelve sharp. Now don't play me false."

"No. You may depend on me. Good bye."

"What! not a kiss?"

"Certainly not!" and she darted away at the top of her speed.

We can promise our Readers a real treat when the next



ROGER HYDE LAY BACK ON THE BEACH AND EXPLODED WITH LAUGHTER.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MRS. PASKE was giving a ball—a very grand affair indeed. It was fixed for the week after Sara had had a long interview with Mr. Horne. Mr. Horne was invited, so were all the neighbourhood, and all the garrison from Dover and Walmer.

For days beforehand the house had, so to speak, been turned out of the windows, and Sara was busy arranging, altering and decorating. She had a taste that way; and Miss Pontifex, who had none, recognised and appreciated the fact, and stood over her like a veritable slave driver from morning till night. Sara had no rest.

The eventful day arrived, with supper and flowers and band from London; and Sara was truly thankful when her two ladies were dressed in full ball costume, and despatched to the ball room. Not that her labours were over. She had to dress herself with extra smartness, and to wait with needle and thread in the ladies' dressing-room, in order to do repairs.

Carriages arrived in dozens. There was a sound of music, dancing and revelry. Crowds of girls came flocking in, and Sara was much amused to watch their behaviour at the glass. How long some stayed, and how they pulled their hair this way and that, and patted their noses with a powder-puff, and gazed at themselves sideways! Others just gave a glance and passed on, and these were generally the pretty ones!

After awhile all had come and gone. She had done taking off and piling away wraps and arranging ladies' skirts and trains and head-dresses.

The ball was in full swing, and she peeped in at the door and watched. Mrs. Paske and her diamonds; Mr. Paske,

gloomy, but feigning delight at the presence of his guests; Amy, prying round and enjoying herself; and Miss Pontifex, looking unusually well, chatting to a man with great animation. Her hair did Sara credit. Her white satin dress suited her well. Suddenly the man turned round, and behold—he was Roger!

Yes, Roger in uniform, looking quite gay and happy and prosperous! Where had he come from? She went out quickly and asked a waiter what regiment all these officers were in—those in blue waistcoats and red mess jackets?

"The Privaters," he replied. "They only came to Dover from abroad about a month ago. They are a sporting set, and have lots of coin, especially that good-looking chap with the reddish moustache dancing with Miss Pontifex."

She gazed. Her eyes followed him round the room. To think that he was so near to her, and how well he looked, as if he had not a care in the world! Not a hungry cousin Bernard, waiting to pounce on his fortune, much less a nameless wife, whom he had picked up in the Strand!

She stood and watched dance after dance—the young and elderly, fat and lean, gliding, bounding, hopping, all after their several fashions, after a set of romping lancers.

Miss Pontifex appeared at the door, yards of tulle trailing after her.

"Oh, Parr!" she said pleasantly—she was always pleasant in public—"just look how I am torn! Is it not frightful? Bring your needle and thread to me as quickly as possible. My partner is waiting."

Yes, standing outside the open door, holding her fan! He glanced indifferently at the ladies' maid—another glance by no means indifferent—for in the pretty maid

he recognised both Sylvia Paske and Sara Parr.

Sara saw his glance, his start, and met them quite calmly; and when Miss Pontifex was standing with her back to her, tapping her foot impatiently as her maid tucked her rags together, that maid looked significantly at Miss Pontifex's partner and laid her finger on her lips.

Strange to say, he hung about the neighbourhood of the ladies' room, and, when no one was looking but Sara, came and slipped his programme into her hand, on the back of which was written,—

"Must see you. Meet me to-morrow on Walmer Beach at three o'clock, near flag-staff."

She opened it, read it, and nodded. She could easily get to Walmer on pretence of shopping.

She saw Mr. Horne at the ball leaning in doorways, looking on, going to the refreshment buffet, and generally following Miss Pontifex with his eyes.

Sara was sure that, in spite of what he said, he admired her, and she flouted him. She was just the sort of well-set-up, splendid young woman that would be sure to catch his rather gaudy taste.

Gradually the small hours crept on, and the ball waned in broad daylight.

After all the sleepy people had roused themselves next day, and the house had been put a little to rights, and the ladies and gentlemen were lunching on the remains of the cold supper, Sara walked off into Walmer, ostensibly to watch some ribbon!

She took unusual pains with her appearance, and her pains were amply repaid. She was a very striking looking girl, even to indifferent eyes as she walked up to a

Serial Story by that popular writer Florence Hodgkinson begins.

gentleman who stood near the flagstaff awaiting her.

"So you have managed to get away?" he said, shaking hands. "That was clever. And I say, how awfully fit you are looking? I would scarcely have known you again—either as Sara Parr or Sylvia Paske. How strange that you should be the girl I helped in Malta!"

"Yes, and good food, and air, and lodging do make a difference. I was so surprised to see you last night!"

"Not more than I was to see you playing the rôle of lady's maid. We came home a month ago, and are quartered in Dover. It's rather convenient for you and me, is it not?" smiling.

"Cela depend," she said, with a shrug.

"Oh, I say, you are not glad to see me?"

"Not particularly!" and she laughed.

"You are a nice sort of wife I must say!"

"I don't believe I am your wife at all! If I am not Sylvia Paske I cannot be Sylvia Hyde?"

"Yes; but until a thing's not proved to be false the fact remains. And what is your news?"

"Bad," she returned, laconically.

"No progress? Come and sit behind this boat, where we shall be sheltered. No progress, you say?"

"Hardly any. After six months' hard work as ladies' maid I have only found out a few things."

"And they are?" leaning his hand on his elbow and looking at her interrogatory.

"That Mr. Paske comes from Australia, and has no kin in this country. That he is an unhappy, nervous, suspicious man; that he has a secret which is shared by his former neighbour—Mr. Horne."

"Oh! You seemed to have found out a good deal."

"And I am trying to get round Mr. Horne, and to worm it out of him."

"By Jove!" admiringly, "and what is Horne like?"

"He is a dark, flashy-looking man who idles and goes to races, and talks a great deal. He is shy of ladies, but not a bit shy with me!"

"What do you mean?" a dark red flush of anger rising to Roger's face.

"I only mean that he admires me, and that I am going over to spend my next 'day out' with him in Dover!"

"Certainly not! I would not hear of it!" said Roger, energetically.

"Oh, yes, you will. You have no control over me, and it's all strictly in the way of business."

"You are far too pretty a girl to be marauding about with this rascal. For if he is Paske's friend, of course he is a scoundrel!"

"There is no fear of me. You need not be nervous, nor is there any right or reason why you should be! And what is your news?"

"Bad, like your own. Bad news seems catching. The supplies are stopped, and I am nearly stone-broke!"

"If you can only hold on another few months, it may come right yet."

"And if not?" raising his handsome straight brows.

"You are not quite penniless."

"I have one hundred and fifty pounds a-year, a lot of boots and clothes, some guns and saddlery, and a horse and dog-cart. That's about the sum total."

"Then I don't pity you! You have youth and health, and a hundred and fifty pounds a-year. You ought to be able to get on very well. A little roughing will do you a world of good; will harden you! Luxury is very bad for a young man. You have had too much of it. You have been spoiled."

"Oh, I say! Come, aren't you awfully rough on me?"

"Not a bit. Why, look at me—a girl, a woman. I work hard and earn my bread!"

"You had much better chuck the whole and come and establish yourself in Dover as Mrs. Hyde. I can't give you much, but I can do better for you than where you are."

"Thank you; but I am going to stay where I am."

"For how long?"

"Time will tell," she returned, rather gravely.

"Quite true, Sylvia. I say, what a pretty foot you have!" noticing the neat little shoe that was exposed below her dress.

"Have I? How is Mrs. Dering?"

"Bother Mrs. Dering!" taking up a stone and throwing it into the sea.

"Bother Mrs. Dering!" in a high key of amazement. "What an extraordinary way to speak of her! Where is she now?"

"I don't know, I am sure, and I don't care. And so your friend died?"

"Yes, poor girl; and I have to thank you that she ended her days in comfort and in peace," and she wiped away two tears.

"Look here, Mr. Hyde."

"Not Mr. Hyde, and, anyway, I have a handle to my name. I am Captain Hyde!"

"Captain Hyde, I have an idea!"

"Then please to pass it on!"

"You may have to go out to India, and follow up a clue. I must have Mr. Paske traced, and see where he fell in with my father."

"I should like to go to India of all things. I have always wanted to get some big game shooting. Elephants in Mysore, tigers in the Terai—"

"This expedition would be in quest of another kind of game; and for big shooting you want a big purse."

"I am quite ready to go. You are running the whole show, and I am entirely in your hands. I am not half as clever as you are."

"I dare say you are far cleverer, only you do things on impulse, and I don't. I can make schemes, and once I take up a business I stick to it."

"I sincerely hope you will stick to me!" he said, eagerly.

"Don't be silly! This is serious talk. I have no time for joking, and I must be hurrying off to dress my young lady for dinner."

"I say, Sylvia, how on earth did you manage to plant yourself in that family, and to please? Miss P. told me you were a treasure!"

"Mrs. Hyde gave me a personal recommendation, and a splendid character."

"What Mrs. Hyde?" he asked in amazement.

"Why, the only one I know. Mrs. Hyde, of Twickenham, who used to live at the Lindens."

"Please explain?" sitting up erect, and staring at her.

"Sara Parr wanted a place, especially a place with the Paskes. She applied for their vacancy, and had no reference, of course; and a reference is, as you may suppose, the main thing!"

"Go on. This is getting interesting."

"Interesting! I should think so. I wrote, of course, a first-class character for myself, but that was not enough; they wanted a personal interview. They actually drove down to Twickenham. I need not tell you Mrs. Hyde was out. Next day I dressed up as a very nice old lady, grey hair, spectacles, veil, long cloak, and went to town, and saw Mrs. Paske, and was rather high and mighty, I can assure you; and she was put out that I did not bring Sara

with me. I said she was packing, and would wait on Mrs. Paske next day, and she did; and has been waiting on her ever since, and waiting in another sense on Mr. Paske."

"And what became of Mrs. Hyde?"

"Oh, she went abroad the next day, with her old and intimate friend the Princess of Saragossa."

Roger lay back on the beach, and exploded with laughter.

"By Jove! you are a most amusing girl, Sara Parr, and you don't stick at a trifle."

"No, I don't. No one could say I did after my bargain with you at Temple Station; but it was a matter of life and death, and I only regret it now for your sake."

"Don't, for I don't. Here are we sitting under this boat a couple of young paupers, and yet we have each a fortune if we could only get at it. One is sure to tumble in. You see if it don't."

"And supposing it is mine, and that I am not Sylvia Paske at all?" inquired Sara.

"Oh! then I shall expect you to make it all right, you know, and marry me over again."

"Blessed are they that don't expect," she said, rising to her feet. "Are you coming to Mrs. Paske's theatricals? They intend to offer you a part."

"They may offer. I have no intention of accepting. Now you, I should say, were a born actress."

"I believe I am! All my life long I have wanted to go upon the stage. I remember scandalising one of the nuns most awfully when she was pressing me about a vocation, and to take the veil. I said I was far more likely to take to the stage. Maybe I shall be on it yet!"

"Never with my consent," said Roger, emphatically.

"How do you know it will be asked?"

"Oh, come Sylvia! You know you are not in earnest. For my own part I have played the fool often, I am sorry to say, and the Devil more than once, but I have never played upon the boards of a theatre, and never shall!"

"The boards are a splendid place; and if a man has only talent and perseverance he makes a fortune—a fortune and a name—and is the means of giving delight to thousands and thousands."

"Yes, if he succeeds on the boards—a chance a hundred to one! It's more likely the poor fool, like a fellow I once knew, comes to walk between them in the shape of a sandwich man. He had a craze for the stage, and he thought he was Kean and Kemble rolled into one, and his crazy ruined him. He is a pauper now!"

"Well, I must be off, or I shall get into trouble. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye," taking her hand and holding it in his, and looking at her eagerly.

"When shall I see you again?"

"I don't know."

"I suppose I must not come loafing about the place?"

"No, indeed! I have one follower already in Mr. Horne, and Hopkins, the footman, who is a great admirer of mine, and very jealous; and to have three, would be a terrible complication."

"Hopkins, the footman! Confound his impudence."

"He is a very respectable young man; and if I were in his station I might do worse than marry him."

"And Hopkins, the footman, is very jealous, is he? And I may as well tell you that I can be very jealous too. I suppose I may write?"

"Yes, to Miss Parr, and in a plain envelope like a tradesman's—no crest, no square envelope. Well, finally, good-bye!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

MR. HORNE dined with Mr. Paske and family the day after the ball. He was in a bad humour—a very bad humour.

Mr. Paske was sleepy, Miss Pontifex was snubby. It was all Mr. Paske could do to to keep the peace, seconded by Amy.

Mr. Horne was not merely pushing to-night, he was insolent and overbearing; and Mrs. Paske was amazed to hear her husband taking his rough jokes in good part. He certainly would not stand such plain-speaking from anyone else!

Mr. Horne chafed him about asking him in to eat up the cold supper, and what he vulgarly called "the broken victuals!"

He chafed Miss Pontifex about her partiality for good-looking Captain Hyde, and said—

"But you know it will never do for two red-headed people to take up with one another. Two of a trade you see—"

"Red head! His hair is a lovely auburn," she exclaimed, angrily. "It is beautiful hair!"

"Oh! of course you say so; and I suppose he says yours is golden—eh?"

"My hair is the colour it is by nature—red or golden—thank goodness!" darting a furious glance at his black looks. "It is not dyed, like some people's."

Mr. Horne became purple with rage.

"What do you mean, Miss Pontifex? Do you insinuate that I dye my hair?" he asked, in a choked voice.

"I never insinuate. You seem very angry, and if the cap fits pray wear it. If you are rude to me I can be unpleasant as well, so I warn you!"

"Not half as unpleasant as I can be," he said with a sneer. "You have no idea how disagreeable I can make myself if I try. Ask Mr. Paske?"

"Not much trying required. It is your chronic state!" said the young lady, sarcastically.

"Come, come!" broke in Mr. Paske.

"This joking has gone far enough. Let us talk of something else. I hear young Hyde has something like twenty thousand a-year. I wonder if it is true?"

"Twenty thousand fiddles?" repeated Mr. Horne.

"But he was old Robert Hyde's heir, and he had money."

"Yes; heir on certain conditions; and if those conditions are not fulfilled—and I believe they are not—Bernard Hyde takes all, and this fellow is a beggar!"

"Bernard Hyde!" said Mrs. Paske. "A charming little fair man; so gentlemanly and so popular—a wonderful whistler. I used to hear him at lady Poodletail's 'at homes' last season."

"Bernard Hyde is a little white sepulchre," said Mr. Horne, savagely, remembering heavy losses to that gentleman at cards. "He may be what you call very gentlemanly, and he may whistle like a canary; but he is a regular little rip—a blackleg!"

"Oh, come, Mr. Horne! Try and remember where you are—that he is a friend of ours!" said Miss Pontifex, red with passion.

"Yes, if you like; and all I can say to that is, birds of a feather—"

"Mr. Paske, this is too much!" interrupted Victoria, furiously rising, her face in a flame. "How can you sit by and allow your low Australian friend—whose proper place is the servants' hall—to insult my mother and me. You ought to kick him out of the house!"

"I should just like to see him try," said Mr. Horne.

Victoria stood and glared. The veins in her white throat seemed swollen to bursting.

"He would sooner turn you out of the house than me. I can tell you that, Miss Victoria Pontifex. There he sits. You can ask him!"

Mr. Paske looked very savage—very uncomfortable, and very red in the face; but he said nothing.

"One word then!" said Miss Pontifex, shrilly. "I am not bound to meet people like Mr. Horne, who is now, in my opinion, drunk; and I shall never sit at table with or speak to him again;" and carrying her head very high she sailed out of the room, followed by her mother and sister; but ere the door closed on them Mr. Horne poured in the last round of shot.

"Never speak to me again! never see me again! So much the better. Best news I've had for some time!"

When the door was closed the two men were alone, Mr. Paske poured out some fine old port into a claret glass, and raising it with a shaky hand, drank it off before he spoke.

"I say Horne, she is right. You go too far, you know. You show the cloven hoof! This dining-room is not one of your bars at Port Augusta!"

"No, I wish it was. She riles me, that young woman. She looks as if she would like to throw me in the mud, and walk over me. I am not going to be anyone's doormat. Why should I? Why should I put up with insolence and airs from anyone, least of all from a soul belonging to you, eh! Tell me that?"

"I tell you, you are all cross and sleepy after last night's ball. That is what ails you. Come away to my snuggery, and have one of my new cigars. Why should you let yourself be drawn by a woman's tongue. They are all the same."

"Oh, yes, that's all very fine; but Miss Pontifex had better learn that she had best keep hers between her teeth, and treat Charlie Horne civilly, or—or—there will be wigs on the green, and I shall have to be disagreeable—deuced disagreeable."

William Hopkins, as he left the dining-room, has seen Sara Parr crossing the hall, and accosted her, as usual, with much *empressément*.

"Great sport in there," pointing with his thumb. "Miss Pontifex and Mr. Horne going at each other hammer and tongues. I'd no idea ladies and gentlemen went on at one another, like that. They might be two barges or a couple of fishwives! I never heard the like."

"And what is he saying?"

"She said if he was so rude she would be disagreeable to him; and he said he would be twice as disagreeable to her, and he spoke in a threatening sort of way. What seems so queer is, that the governess sat there looking in one of his blank rages, but never said a word. If Horne spoke like that to one of my womenkind I'd twist his ugly neck off his body. I hate that Horne. He is just a low, racing, gambling cad, trying to pass off as a gentleman. He owes a fine bill at the 'Walmer Arms!'"

"Why do they give him credit?"

"Because they know the master will pay."

"And yet I don't think he and Mr. Paske are so very fond of one another?" said Sara, involuntarily.

"If you ask me, Miss Parr, I should say he just hated him like poison; but I believe he has some sort of hold over him. This is between you and me—quite under the rose, you know."

"Oh, of course; but what a silly idea, Mr. Hopkins."

She did not wish anyone to share her own suspicions.

"Are the gentlemen in the dining-room still?"

"Yes; but they are going to the smoking-room as soon as James takes in the spirits and cigars."

"Oh, well, I must be off, I have some work to do."

And she hurried away with a brisk, light step.

Some work to do. All that day she had been brooding over her lost six months, of the deadlock of her affairs.

She was home a year and four months, and how much nearer was she to the object of her search than she had been in Calcutta? And what had she not gone through in those barren weeks and days—privation, starvation, hard work, to what she had descended, and for nothing.

Here, thanks to her lies, she was under Mr. Paske's own roof, and had been doing menial work in a family living in luxury on her fortune.

At this moment she was liable to be called to read aloud, to mend, to dress hair, to wash lace. What was she gaining by all this? she asked herself, angrily—nothing.

She was going to sleep. A little of Roger's impetuosity would be a good thing. She was making no head against Mr. Paske's impenetrable character. He had no weakness, except occasionally for chloral.

He kept his keys, his own counsel, and his secret. He did not drink, he did not talk. Twenty years' practice made prudence second nature!

She could not reach him through his men of business, nor through his wife, nor through his conscience. He was like a rhinoceros—he had no vulnerable point. He presented an unbroken wall to all her attacks.

CHAPTER XXX.

WERE Miss Parr to place the matter in a lawyer's hand, where were her proofs? and where was her money?

She had one hundred and fifty pounds; but if a detective was sent out to India to look into matters that had happened twenty years previously, one hundred and fifty pounds would not go far.

There was Roger, but Roger would be a bad detective; he was so open, so impetuous, so rash; and, moreover, how could he get leave?

She must depend upon herself, as she had often done before.

Mr. Paske must have some vulnerable point; the rhinoceros could be killed in one place, a small one it was true—the eye; Mr. Paske might be tripped up and caught by means of his old chum, Mr. Horne.

And now she was tired of this long waiting on events.

Everything does not come to those who wait; when it does arrive it is generally too late for them to enjoy it.

She would strike a bold stroke, and take the consequences; she would precipitate matters.

The two friends were going to spend the evening in the smoking-room. It was chilly enough now at the end of September. The windows were closed, the curtains drawn.

Why should she not conceal herself behind the curtains of the deep bay window, and listen to their conversation?

She would glean more in that way in a night than she would pick up from chance "talks" with Mr. Horne in months.

No sooner thought of than done.

She slipped down the passage, and down four steps, and found the door of the smoking-room ajar.

It looked bright and comfortable, with candles, arm-chairs, and a nice fire, in front of which was drawn up a small table, with

a case of spirits and a box of cigars. It all looked very snug indeed—just the place for a confidential interview.

Sara had barely time to get behind the window curtains when she heard Mr. Horne's loud voice in the passage outside.

"This is something like," said Mr. Horne, cheerily, as he threw himself into an arm-chair and stretched out his legs. "Pon my word, Mr. P., you have not made a bad thing of it. Now, have you?"

"Nor you; and, by Jove, you have six to four the best of it," said the other, drawing up a chair.

"Now, I'd like to know how you make that out?" said Mr. Horne, lighting a cigar. "You, with your town house, your country place, your men-servants and maid-servants, your wife with her diamonds, your step-daughter with her airs, your own—"

"Stop; leave Amy out of the list," said Mr. Paske, sharply.

"Well, with all these items, and plenty of money at your bankers, you are a happy, prosperous man. What more do you want? Whilst I—I am a sort of loafer without a home, that lives in lodgings, and on whatever you give me."

"You are a precious expensive loafer, I can tell you, Charlie Horne. I've paid you, in one way or another, twelve hundred within two months."

"And what's that to a man with five thousand a year?"

"Five thousand a-year; that gives me precious little pleasure. Do you think I care for a carriage and horses, and giving big balls and dinners to people who don't care twopence about us, and would cut us if we had no coin. I loathe it all—hate it. My wife spends, Miss Pontifex spends, the servants spend, you spend. I am only the paymaster—that's my part—and supposed to be my pleasure. I often wish I just had a little place, and a bit of a garden, and a pipe, and, say, a hundred a-year, and peace."

"You used not to think that in Port Augusta long ago. You were all for going out in the world, and making a great stir and a great name, and being a very fine fellow. You were ambitious, Mr. P., even in short jackets—ambitious of money and power, and to get them with as little personal trouble as possible; and—and—by Jove—" blowing a cloud of tobacco in the air—"you did. You got your wish."

"So you think. I pulled the chestnuts out of the fire, and you ate them, my friend!"

"True, and so did you. You have had a very good time this last twenty years, have you not?"

"Yes, I suppose so!" he admitted, reluctantly.

"Suppose so! Better than making a few rupees on some desolate mountain teastate in India, or on some desolate 'run' up country at home. You always were a gambler, even as a brat of a boy, I've heard, and you threw for a big stake, and collared it."

"And played no more. Now you go on gambling still, and some day you will ruin me, and the whole thing will burst up. I have always expected it."

"And if it does, what a comedown for Miss Pontifex! You have spoiled that girl—woman, I mean. She has had her head turned."

"Not I! She has it in the blood. She was born so!"

"To-night she looked as if she would like to have my blood, as if she would bite me!"

"She is all bark, no bite!" said Mr. Paske, with a faint attempt at wit. "When do you think of going back to Australia, Charlie, my boy?"

"Oh, I don't know!"

"Why, you talked of this autumn?"

"Did I? Well, it was only talk!"

"And yet you say the life over here is slow, and you are sick of it, and long for Australia, and dampers, and old chums, and watch horses."

"Oh, you want to get rid of me?"

Silence.

"Come, silence gives consent! Speak out your mind!"

"Well, to be as plain spoken as you are, I do. People wonder why you are always hanging about me. They will begin to suspect. My wife and family don't fancy you!"

"No," with a loud guffaw. "Anyone can see that!"

"And I am always in fear of your letting fall some word that may do mischief."

"I am safe enough. Have I not been mum for twenty years? I am as safe as a church!"

"Yes! but I have a queer presentiment of evil. Whether it is that my liver is out of order or what I don't know; but I feel ill and depressed. You know that girl would not stay in the convent, and scouted the action of taking the veil. She has come home."

"Good gracious! You don't mean it!" starting up.

"Yes I do. I did all I could to keep her in Calcutta. I stopped her allowance. However, she made her way to London. She went to Dombey and Son, and wanted my address. She is a very determined piece of goods!"

"The deuce she did!"

"And, of course, I told them not to notice her."

"And is that all?"

"No; not long ago I had a visit—it was last January—from a Mrs. Hyde, a friend of hers. She wanted me to acknowledge her as my daughter, and produce her certificate of birth, and all that sort of thing."

"Why?"

"Because she was about to marry—to marry well, and the man naturally wanted to know who she was, and who her people were."

"Yes, and were you equal to the occasion?"

"I think so. I said she was a station-master's daughter, and her name was Shandy. I had had her educated out of charity, and had done a great deal for her. I sent her ten pounds, and advised her to go into service, for I would have nothing more to do with her, as she had come to England against my express wish."

"Haw, haw, haw! What a cool card you are, James! No taking you aback! Catch a weasel asleep. Ten pounds out of five thousand a year—all her own money! Well, that's a good joke!"

"Hash, you idiot! Walls have ears!"

"Not in an old house like this, my friend! How nervous you are, and you certainly are looking very seedy. Is it true you take chloral? It's a bad habit you know?"

"Yes; but I am obliged to. I sleep so badly."

"Surely you have got over that by this time?" with another hoarse laugh. "Do you have bad dreams?"

"I tell you I can't sleep. It's constitutional, the doctor says, and it's uncommonly trying."

"The doctor says! What does he know? Constitutional! Oh, my eye!"

"Well, and about Australia?"

"Yes, and what about it?" in a sleepy voice.

"What will you take to go back? You must see it does not do, your hanging about. My wife often wonders I put up with your insolence; and she has been hinting that you have a hold over me, and levy blackmail, and it's not very pleasant."

"Blackmail is an ugly word," using an oath. "What would she call appropriating five thousand a year for twenty years, eh? One hundred thousand pounds! That's something like a sum, and worse than any amount of blackmail. It's downright highway robbery!"

"Blackmail or not, what will you take to go—to go and never come back?"

"Ten thousand pounds down on the nail, no less."

"Ten thousand! Say a hundred whilst you are about it," said Mr. Paske, sarcastically.

"No," doggedly. "I say ten, and stick to ten, no more, and no less. I may take more!"

"And where am I to get ten thousand pounds? You know very well the estate is tied up. I cannot touch a shilling of the capital, and never could."

"And a good job, too! It would have been gone long ago. You can insure your life, and raise it in that way."

"I think five are as much as I can give you."

"Then I advise you to think again, for I won't budge under ten," said Mr. Horne, with much resolution in his tone.

"Horne, do you know that sometimes I feel as if I could murder you?"

"I daresay. It is not the first time you have had that feeling about a man; but you won't do it as you did before, for I am always armed, with this very nice pocket revolver!"

Sara peeped out cautiously with just one eye. Mr. Horne had a glass of highly-coloured whisky in one hand, and a revolver that he was gazing at affectionately in the other. Mr. Paske was lying back in the chair, an extinguished cigar between his lips, surveying him with a look of absolutely murderous hate.

"Well, I suppose you must get it," he said after a pause. "Any sacrifice to get rid of you. I daresay I'll manage it by the end of the month, and then I'll hand you over the money, and you will hand me over the papers."

"What papers?" said the other, coolly.

"Don't pretend you don't understand, and don't be a fool! Why, the papers—the marriage certificates, her birth certificate, her letters, all the things in that brown leather portfolio that you stole!"

"Yes, I certainly did steal them—they represent my bread and cheese. Do you think that if I had not cribbed them I would ever have been able to have squeezed a shilling from you? No, James, I knew you for a hard, scheming man, that lets nothing stand in your way when you have an end to gain. You would have pushed me aside, down into the gutter. It would be only your word against mine, and you a rich man and I a poor one. An impostor, you would have said; but luckily I have the proofs. Oh, that was a grand day for me when I came into this study, and you were out, only for a second, and I recognised the brown portfolio, and carried it off. I never would have guessed its value had you not made such a fuss and such a looking up of it once, when I came upon you unexpectedly once before."

"Where is it now?"

"At my lawyers. No, no, you have no chance. You can't steal it. It's in a strong box, and only to be given up by my written authority."

"You will give it up for ten thousand pounds?"

"And set you free for ever?" with a sneer.

"And set me free for ever," he repeated.

"And supposing I won't?"

"Then you must support yourself in future."

"And peach on you?"

"Yes, if you like. It will ruin me, of course."

"Ruin you! Hang you, you mean!"

"No, I don't. There is no fear of my neck, thank you. I shall lose the money. I may get a year's imprisonment—that is the most harm you can do me."

"A year's! You'll be a lifer, as sure as I sit here!"

"And you will starve. You could not earn an honest penny if your life depended on it. You can cheat at cards and over races. That's your way of earning money!"

"If I were you I would be ashamed to talk of honest pennies. I wonder the word does not choke you!"

"And if I were you I'd take ten thousand pounds and clear out of this country. It's a good offer, and you will never get a better, so think it over carefully."

"Well, I'll think it over, and let you know to-morrow."

"You must fire the papers."

"If I do you must make it twelve thousand."

"What a rascal you are, Charlie Horne!"

"The same to you. You are the pot if I am the kettle. It's a temptation to collar the swag, and go back to her country. I've a longing to see the old bluegum trees, and the bright sky out there once more, and to hear the bleating and mooing in the stock-yards."

"How poetical and romantic, and to gamble in low dens, and to drink in bars, and to swagger over the old chums as long as you have a coin in your pocket."

"Talking like that is a good way to make me give you what you want, is it not?"

"Oh! If you sink me I sink you. We sink or swim together; and I fancy you know on which side your bread is buttered; no one better."

"I'm not sanguine in that. Well, time is flying, and I must go. It's nearly one o'clock. I'll let you have an answer to-morrow, and if it is yes you and I pay over within a month. I'm thinking of taking a wife out with me. What do you say to that?"

"Who—who would have you?"

"Oh! a monstrous fine girl, and one that looks as well bred as any lady in the land—your wife's maid, Sara Parr. I suppose you have noticed her?"

"I don't like that girl."

"Then she and I will be in the same boat, so that's as it should be. She is handsome, young, agreeable, and clever."

"Ay, that's just it. She has a fine pair of eyes and a sharp tongue. She is clever. Take care you don't find her too clever for you some day. Is it settled that you are going to marry her?"

"Quite."

"Have you asked her?"

"No; but that is a mere matter of form. The girl is madly in love with me!" he said, impressively.

"Everyone to their taste. As far as I am concerned, I shall be glad to see the last of her. She always seems to me as if she was looking for something, and always had her ears pricked." Clever Mr. Paske!

"She was probably watching and listening for me," said Mr. Horne, with outrageous conceit.

"Oh, possibly!" said the other, with a grunt.

"Well, I'm off. You had better let me out through the window here, not to be knocking up your house and grand men-servants. Lord, if they only knew. Many a time I have seen you cleaning your father's horse and buggy, and chopping wood."

By this time Mr. Paske had pushed back

the curtains and opened the window, letting a cold blast into the room. Luckily for Sara he brought no candle, and she stood cowering up in a corner, scarcely venturing to draw her breath.

Mr. Paske was in a hurry to speed the parting guest. Mr. Horne was in a hurry to be gone. He made his exit quickly, the window was closed, the curtain drawn, and Sara still stood with her knees knocking together, her face damp with perspiration, but undiscovered.

Mr. Paske drew up to the fire, lit a cheroot, poured out nearly half a tumbler of raw brandy, and sat over the coals buried in thought, running his squarely-shaped hands through his grizzly hair and occasionally muttering aloud.

At last he fell asleep. The fire went out, the clock on the mantelpiece struck three. Sara was tired and cold. She slipped off her shoes and stealthily crept out from her hiding-place. She was safe; he was snoring. Gently she reached the door, softly she turned the handle, and stole up like a ghost to her own room.

Luckily no one shared it with her. She then undressed rapidly in the dark said her prayers, and got into bed and slept soundly.

Her boldness and audacity had been rewarded. She had done a good night's work, and found out something at last!

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 2000. Back Nos. can be obtained through any newsagent.)

LITTLE KINDNESSES.

You gave on the way a pleasant smile

And thought no more about it;

It cheered a life that was sad the while

That might have been wrecked without it;

And so for the smile and its fruitage fair

You'll reap a crown some time—some where.

You spoke one day a cheering word,

And passed to other duties;

It warmed a heart, new promise stirred,

And painted a life with beauties.

And so for the word and its silent prayer

You'll reap a palm some time—some where.

You lent a hand to a fallen one,

A lift in kindness given;

It saved a soul when help was none,

And won a heart for heaven;

And so for the help you proffered there

You'll reap a joy some time—some where.

At the coming Coronation there are many perquisites in connection with the appropriation of which there is sure to be some fun. The service will be held in Westminster Abbey, and one of the perquisites here is the beautiful organ which has been "claimed" by the officiating organist at the last four Coronations, and possession of the instrument has been amply compensated for. The organist at the Coronation Service will probably receive a cheque for £500 in settlement of all claims, and naturally the question is who will be the lucky man to be appointed to the post. Since the Coronation of George III., the composer to the Chapel Royal has always superseded the regular organist at the Abbey. The present composer to the Chapel Royal, and organist at St. James's Palace, is Dr. William Cresser, and people are wanting to know if he will exercise his rights and oust Sir Frederick Bridge from the Abbey organ loft next June.

Woman Against Woman.

By Effie Adelaide Rowlands,

Author of "Flower of Fate," "Unseen Fires," &c., &c.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Lord Greville and a party of friends are watching and have put into Ostend for a few hours. His brother, Lord Dunstan, has strayed away from the rest of the party, and Lord Greville feeling anxious has gone in search of him. While strolling round a less frequented part of the town he is stopped by a woman who asks assistance, which is readily given. On returning to his friends he finds that they have accidentally met Mrs. Archdale and her daughters, and it is at the earnest request of Lord Dunstan that they decide to remain another night at Ostend. Ione Archdale meets with an accident while on board the *Pearl*, and which detains her for several days. Arriving in England Greville finds that Mrs. Archdale and her daughters have arranged to stay very close to his own Yorkshire seat. Mrs. Archdale plays her cards so adroitly that in the end Greville proposes to Ione, despite the protest of his friend Dick Fraser. Matters are now becoming interesting for Dick Fraser has met Mary, whom Lord Greville befriended, and who is now on the high road to become a popular singer.

CHAPTER XIX.

DESPITE his bombastic thoughts of defiance and future triumph over Mary, Paul Angelotti was by no means in a comfortable frame of mind as he stood before the large fireplace in the hall, and realised slowly and by degrees what had come to pass.

Mary's beauty, coupled with her absolute indifference, and her old hauteur, gave him a sort of shock. She was so changed. At first he had doubted his eyes, though the sound of her voice had made him start. The Mary he had known, more especially in the last few months they had been together, had been so wan, so weary—a tired, miserable pretence, as he had said savagely many times between his teeth, of the young, fresh girl he had made his wife.

The Mary of those days had been a feeble, helpless little creature, always in tears, always frightened, depressed, nervous. It did not seem possible that such a transformation could have been effected as to produce from these materials the slender, graceful woman, with her proud carriage and her exquisite face—a face so beautiful as to rivet the gaze with a sort of magnetic force.

In the years that had gone since the day he purposely uttered the cruel lie that rid him of an incumbrance, there had been a moment now and then in which Angelotti had felt a qualm of conscience over Mary and her fate.

Of course she had gone back to her aunt, he determined. Had not Lady Mostyn come to her rescue he must have heard something of her. It would not have been possible for a poor, feeble girl like her to struggle in the world by herself.

Having this thought in his mind, Angelotti did not let any anxiety as to Mary's future trouble him very much. Lady Mostyn had not written to him, but he did not anticipate that she would. He knew what pride meant to these worldly well-bred women, who would die sooner than let society guess at the secrets of their lives.

He shrugged his shoulders sometimes when he pictured up the sort of existence that would be opened to the miserable girl whose happiness he had wrecked; but beyond a momentary gleam of pity, Paul had no more thought for Mary.

He had, of course, never loved her. His taste did not incline to sentimental school-girls. It was the probability of her fortune

that he wooed—the money that must be hers when her aunt died. That the girl had a pretty face was of course agreeable, but had she been as ugly as Caliban he would have pursued her just the same; and despite her prettiness and delicate grace of manner the man conceived almost a hatred for the girl when the crisis came.

On Mary he vented the disappointment and anger he felt. He was cruel in the most refined way. It delighted him to shock and horrify her pure nature.

Mary became in a very short time familiar with the manners, the deceptions, the tricks that constitute the everyday life of the ordinary adventurer.

Paul Angelotti, or Cosanza, as he called himself then, had from his earliest days preferred to get an existence by hazardous methods rather than devote his brains and hands to honest labour.

Life with Mary was impossible. After a time she was a burden, and required to be fed and housed. So he lazily determined to get rid of the burden, and considered himself clever and fortunate when the girl disappeared.

When he came to London, bringing letters of introduction from some of the best French naves (obtained in a dishonourable and underhand transaction with a young man who had fallen into his power) Paul had no fears as to his success.

His voice, his appearance, were his credentials, his manner and his life were to be others, if needed. As to what might happen from Mary, he had little anxiety. Lady Mostyn had never seen him. If Mary were alive he felt positively sure that she had been transported to some remote spot, and there would be kept as long as her aunt lived to be her guardian. There was, therefore, not much danger to be apprehended from a chance of meeting the girl he had treated so cruelly, and indeed when the claims of society brought him into contact with Lady Mostyn, he judged, from her mourning dress, and from the fact that no mention was ever made of Mary's name, that there was, indeed, an end to all his fears, and that Mary's sorrows were finished in the grave, so Paul Angelotti had gone his way quite comfortably.

His success was immediate, and, what was better, lasting. He found himself honoured, flattered, run after by the best in the land.

His singing was an open sesame to any house. No one cared to inquire into his antecedents. It was enough that he was an artist and a gentleman. His quiet, dignified bearing was, as we have before said, the strongest witness in his favour, and having by his tact and worldly knowledge made for himself friends of some of the most popular men of the time, the rest was easy. His position had grown only more secure. Other artists had come and gone, but Angelotti remained unequalled, certainly unsurpassed. Not even the shadow of a rival had dawned on the horizon of his successful life until this year, and though he had apparently taken so little heed of the adulation and praise bestowed upon Mrs. Arbuthnot, he had in his heart of hearts been piqued and annoyed at her advent.

And now he stood alone by the hall fire at Barrackbourne Castle, and endeavoured to realise the position in all its lights. There was something ludicrous to him in the thought that Mary—poor, weak, foolish Mary, of all people in the world—should stand beside him and calmly and quietly wrest his laurels from him—Mary, whom he had cast off as a despised burden—Mary, whom he had imagined lying dead in her grave, and whose long, still sleep had given him no pang, only a sense of relief and

satisfaction—Mary, who now repudiated him, looking him straight in the face with her magnificent eyes, full of quiet scorn and unutterable contempt—Mary, who had won for herself already a place in the world, and who would keep that place probably when he would be forgotten.

The realisation of all this was almost incomprehensible; it was certainly objectionable. What would she do? Did she mean to continue the line she had taken, and treat him as though he had never existed? or would she wait her opportunity and choose a moment in which to expose him and his villainy, and so ruin him altogether?

He seemed to know even by that fleeting look at her face that she felt she could claim her rights as a wife, did she wish to do so.

The story that had sent her flying from him out into the cold, cruel world, would have to be very differently told now to produce any effect, and would require the strongest proof to substantiate it.

Angelotti bit his lips beneath his dark moustache. He was rarely taken at a disadvantage. Nothing upset his equanimity, as a rule, but the effect of this meeting with one whom he had imagined safely dead and out of his path was too great to be lightly dismissed.

Lady Agnes Grey had watched him curiously from a distance. She noticed he neither spoke nor moved, although there were at least half-a-dozen people standing near him.

"Is he, then, only like everybody else after all?" she said to herself with some contempt. She naturally imagined that Mary's appearance had caused this silence on his part.

Ione, who took the duties of hostess in place of Lady Barrackbourne, had been, of course, constrained to go with Esther and Mary, and conduct them to the Countess's room.

She was barely civil to either of them, and tried to convey by her manner the idea that she at least did not recognise them as guests if the others did.

If she hoped to be successful in putting them ill at ease, she failed completely, for Esther chattered away to Otho, and Mary was walking in front with Greville, too lost in the emotion and excitement the sight of Paul had roused in her breast even to hear what her host was saying to her.

It was a relief when they could leave Lady Barrackbourne and she could be alone in her own room.

Esther busied herself in taking off Mary's cloak and hat and replacing the walking boots with little shoes. This done, she simply lifted the slender figure in her strong arms on to a couch by the fire, and authoritatively declared she must sleep.

Mary looked up at her dear trusted friend.

"It is not easy, Esther," she said, her pale lips trembling.

Esther stooped and kissed the lips.

"You must make it easy, Mary," she answered in her sharp way. "You have begun splendidly, my darling. Nothing could have been better than you were. I watched you carefully. There was hardly a change in your face, while he—"

Esther finished with a grunt.

"Mr. Angelotti will soon find he has a very different person in Mrs. Arbuthnot than he had in Mary Temple," she said, after a little pause. "Then to change the conversation she began discussing Otho, and his delight at seeing them, then drifted on to Lady Barrackbourne's kindness, and chatted in such an easy, natural way, that Mary's agitation gradually subsided, her

nerves were soothed, and she became her quiet self again.

Yet, as she had said to Esther, it was no easy task to school herself to meet the man who had ruined her young life with all the indifference of a complete stranger. After Esther had gone to her own room Mary lay thinking. She recalled, with a shudder of pain and repugnance, all the story of her girlish infatuation. She remembered how Paul's voice had been wont to thrill her through and through, how she had longed for a glimpse of his dark, picturesque face. What dreams of nobility, of goodness, and heroism she had built up around him. Then she recalled her life in Paris, the joyous, the dissipated atmosphere, the coarse surroundings, the fear that had never left her, the agony of mind, the growing horror of all that made up her life, and she felt her heart beating wildly at her thoughts. She lay with throbbing temples and a dull sort of pain in her throat. With all her pride and courage it was impossible not to suffer still at the vivid pictures of misery her imagination conjured up from the past.

She rose at last from the sofa and walked to and fro in the room. The action seemed to relieve her; it broke the tension that bound her nerves.

Gradually she calmed herself, until she found herself thinking of Paul Angelotti quite easily, a smile of contempt on her lips.

"And I used to dread the sound of his footstep; I feared to hear his voice," she said to herself, and the smile went as she shuddered again.

"Ah," she said, almost passionately, "if I could only blot out that past, with all its follies! I feel I must always have some shame linked to my life, because of that man! That I should have loved him!"

She put her hands over her face and stood motionless for a moment.

"That is the horror of it all, she said, slowly, as her hands dropped. "If I could forget it! It seems such an impossibility, now that I now know him as he is, and now that I have seen others."

She walked up to the fire and stood looking into it as if in a dream.

Was it her fancy, or did a picture form itself in the living coals—a picture of a fair, handsome face, with sunny smile and truthful eyes?

Mary found a pleasure in looking at this picture.

Somehow, look where she might she seemed to see this same face before her. It had become a sort of guiding star in her life—a star that pointed to all that was good, generous, noble and happy.

She did not seek to analyse the faint pleasure that seemed to come to her when this face arose before her.

Pleasure had been all too little in her life. She accepted it without questioning, and was content.

So now, in one of the most troubled moments of a troubled career, Mary found a sort of vague comfort and protection in the remembrance that, though she was under the same roof as sheltered Paul Angelotti, so, too, she was near to one whom she felt henceforth she could in deed and in truth call her friend, and who would be ready to help her if need demanded she must ask for assistance.

CHAPTER XX.

IONE took especial care with her toilette that evening. She was restless, bad-tempered, and ill to please. Her maid had a *mauvais quart d'heure*. Ione was never the most genial mistress to serve. To-night she was positively impossible. She was annoyed with Angelotti, annoyed with Greville, annoyed with Esther Gail, and her

hated was stronger, if anything, towards Mary and towards the little Earl.

The fact that Otho's old nurse had been reinstated in her former position was little short of an insult, in Ione's eyes. She had said as much to Greville, and she had shown Lady Barrackbourne her objection to this arrangement by refusing to go near her mother-in-law for nearly a week, thereby causing general comment and remark that was little short of pain to the gentle, proud woman who suffered this treatment.

It was a small thing that had fanned the flame of Ione's jealous hate against the child. Otho had been taught from his babyhood to be courteous in thought and manner, and it gave his grandmother and Greville intense satisfaction and delight to see the little fellow in his pretty black velvet suit, with his flaxen curls falling on his shoulders, stand proudly in the entrance hall and receive every new guest with an assumption of dignity that was as amusing as it was charming.

To Ione it was nothing but mortification to see a child usurping what should be her place. She was furious with Lady Barrackbourne and Greville for encouraging this.

"I don't think children should be taught to know they are of such importance! It spoils them and makes them odious," she said once to Greville, who had replied quickly,—

"Oh! Otho is not spoiled, and, after all, he is the most important person in the house and must begin to learn he owes a duty to society. One does not have a title for nothing, my darling!"

Ione had shrugged her shoulders impatiently. She never assisted at this "folly," as she called it, and Otho had no more liking

for Aunt Ione than he had before her marriage.

He had borne with her attentions in London because he had promised grannie to be good, and to be sure and make friends with his new aunt, because it was the right thing to do; and so he had tried to do his best, poor little child, and stifled the dislike and fear that always would come at thought of the brilliant red-haired creature with her hard voice and big shining eyes. But here, at Barrackbourne, Otho felt relieved of an irksome duty, and beyond exchanging little courtesies with Lady Greville he lived his life away from her.

He rarely saw Ione except once a day when he was about to be put to bed. Lady Greville never forgot this visit to the nursery, whatever else she forgot, and Lady Barrackbourne would often take herself to task when the thought crossed her mind, and it would come sometimes that Ione did not care for the child, and argue that she must be wrong, or why should Ione take so much trouble about this little duty?

To-night, when she was at last dressed to her satisfaction, Ione went along the corridor to the nursery. She stood for a moment at the half-open door. Someone was talking in a sweet, low voice—talking pretty nonsense about stars and fairies, and she could hear Otho's delighted laugh and loving words. Ione flushed hotly. Although she hated Otho, she was jealous all the same, that he could be so affectionate with others, and so mute and apparently stupid with her.

She pushed open the door. Mary was sitting by the little cot, holding Otho in her arms.

"And now I am going to sing you to

sleep, little one," she was saying as Ione advanced into the room.

"Where is Mrs. Robbins?" Ione asked shortly of the under-nurse, who was sewing in a corner. "She has no right to leave his lordship in this way! It is quite time he was asleep!"

Mary put the little figure between the sheets and tucked him up.

"I hope I am not doing very wrong?" she said, with her rare sweet smile. "I did not know I was transgressing any rules. I will not forget in future."

Otho looked from her to Ione.

"Why must you not sing?" he said, in his baby way. "Grannie asked you to come, Mrs. Arbuthnot, and I want you." Then with another look at Ione, "I can have what I want, I am the Earl!"

Ione turned ashly white and shivered. Her jewels glittered and trembled for a moment.

"Little children," she said, a little unsteadily, when she spoke, "cannot have everything they want though they are earls. Mrs. Arbuthnot will tell you I am right. Ask her."

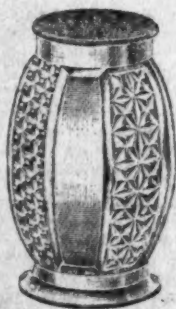
Mary stood holding Otho's small hot hand. The child was always feverish. It seemed to her she had a pain at her heart when she looked at him. He was so very fair and fragile.

She felt distressed and uncomfortable at this moment, and she asked herself vaguely why Lady Greville should show so plainly she did not like her.

"I will run away at once, Lady Greville," she said, with a faint smile. "Good-night, little Otho." She stopped and kissed the child, and then moved gracefully to the door.

"I will go down with you," Ione said,

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CUT THIS OUT

ungraciously. Much as she would have liked it, she could not be too rude to Mary. They left the room together, followed by Otho's big blue eyes, that were full of tears at Mrs. Arbuthnot's departure.

Mary walked down the broad, old stairs beside Ione's radiant figure in silence. It was not easy to talk to one who was so cold and unpleasant as Ione was to her. In silence there was dignity, and Mary preferred to have no further examples of Ione's sharp, rude tongue. They entered the drawing-room together. It was empty save for a man seated by the piano, singing softly.

"What a waste!" Ione said, laughing affectedly as she sauntered across the room. "Fancy M. Angelotti singing with no one to hear him!"

Mary turned white to her lips as she saw Paul's dark face, but she walked without a tremor to a chair by the fire.

She had on a gown of some clinging crepe material, white from head to foot, and carried a large fan of white feathers in her small gloved hand. The fan had been a Christmas gift from Lady de Courcy, and the small gold thread bangle with M. A. in diamonds was another from two of her pupils.

It was the only ornament she wore, but Angelotti said to himself, his eyes going from Ione's vivid colouring to Mary's exquisite delicacy of form and feature, that she needed nothing more. She was perfection in every sense of the word.

Ione saw his gaze wander to the graceful, silent figure in the large chair.

"I suppose," she said, laughing shortly, "that you, too, are going to be like all the rest, and lose your heart to Mrs. Arbuthnot?"

Angelotti paused, then looked down at the face beside him. A desire to amuse himself was all at once strengthened by another wish. Mary's absolute self-control, her dignity, her coldness, roused the man's vanity. She had been his—his entirely once—body and soul, she had belonged to him. By a look, by a word, he had ruled her. Could his power be utterly gone? He would discover this, he said to himself quietly, before many days had passed over their heads.

Ione's face was close to his shoulder.

He laid his hand on her's for a second.

"That is not what you should say to me," he answered, in a grave, low voice.

Ione's pulse thrilled with delight. He spoke in a manner that deceived her, coquette as she was. She gave him a glance from her eyes and a smile. She had only imagined a flirtation with him, but if he were going to be serious the affair would be much more interesting. Her vanity was intensely gratified, especially when she remembered the stories of Angelotti's apparent dislike to all women and the absence of flirtations associated with his name.

Angelotti smiled to himself. He read Ione like an open book as he caressed his moustache, and they advanced to where Mary was sitting.

"Madame has the air of a statue," he said, as he stood beside the chair.

"You like those Greek dresses?" Ione asked. "They suit some people."

This was said in a way that carried a sort of conviction that Mary looked absolutely hideous in her gown.

"It was not altogether the robe," Paul said, in his slow, musical voice. "It is because madame is so pale!"

Mary moved her fan to and fro and looked straight into his dark eyes.

"I am generally pale, monsieur," she said, very quietly. She sat back perfectly calm, with no more apparent emotion in her

body than a statue, to which he had likened her.

Ione bit her lip sharply. She caught a glimpse of her own reflection in a mirror near, and then she glanced at that delicate, oval face, with its pure white skin, its soft, dark hair parted above the brows, its magnificent eyes blue as the night sky, its sweet half-trembling, half-smiling lips.

What was it that made such a difference between this woman and herself? Was she not endowed with wonderful points? Was Mary's hair to be compared with her's? Were not her eyes splendidly handsome, her skin fair as a lily? Was she not graceful and pretty in her movements? What, then, did she lack that even to her own sight made her seem almost vulgar, and certainly inferior, when contrasted with Mrs. Arbuthnot?

"I suppose you use rouge when you want to look your best?" she said, flinging herself into a chair on the other side of the hearth. "All professionals do it, don't they?"

A little natural rouge appeared on Mary's pale cheeks for a moment.

"I have not adopted many professional habits as yet, Lady Greville," she said, coldly. Then she turned to Paul,—

"I am afraid, Mr. Angelotti," she said, speaking as easily as though no heart or nerve ever throbbed in her body, "I shall have to ask you to permit me to have our first duet transposed. I find the present key a little unsuitable."

"I am at Mrs. Arbuthnot's entire disposal," Paul said, with a low bow and a meaning look in his dark eyes. His astonishment and pique grew greater every moment. He had mixed in the world of fashion so much he was conversant with the ways and manners of all its great ladies, yet in none had he found more dignity, more wonderful grace and refinement, than in this slender, lovely creature who held him off, as it were, by a circle of icy contempt and scornful dislike. It was almost like a dream. Could it be really possible that it was Mary his wife who sat there absolutely impassive and indifferent to his presence? The hot southern blood within his veins rose in a new fashion for this beautiful woman. He set his teeth and swore beneath his breath a resolution to break her indifference and make her know his power once again.

How well she acted her part. It seemed incredible to him that any woman, more especially Mary—poor, nervous, weak-nerved Mary—should treat this moment so coolly, should show such marvellous spirit and self-possession. Why, she could talk to him with as much ease and langour as though she had never until this moment set eyes upon his face.

Ione, while she flitted about talking to this one and that, watched those two jealously. She felt, with a thrill of anger, that it was impossible for any one to look at Mrs. Arbuthnot and not be impressed with her wonderful charm and beauty. Paul Angelotti was, after all, only human, why should he not share in the general admiration Mary excited?

Ione's colour rose, and her pulse quickened dangerously. She had succeeded so far with this man, but she would not be content until her coquetry had reduced him to folly and madness for her sake. She knew her power over Greville and others; it was not likely she would fail with Angelotti, and it would be indeed a triumph to her vanity when it became whispered about, as of course it would be, that he, the unapproachable, the anchorite, the saint, had lost his reason and his heart for the sake of her brilliant beauty.

She immediately conceived the idea that

Mary intended to flirt with Angelotti, and this thought whetted her purpose and hurried her into further action. She hoped she would annoy Greville by this flirtation. As yet he had been provokingly indifferent as to what she and Paul might do. The thought that Greville had undoubted belief and confidence in her love and Angelotti's friendship made her sneer.

"It is always the unexpected that happens," she said to herself, "and as to trusting your friend—" She shrugged her shoulders. "Well, surely a knowledge of the world should make even his dull brain understand how foolish that idea is. It was exploded long ago." And then Ione had added, "However, if M. Angelotti is loyal and true, I shall soon put him to the proof."

The evening of Mary's arrival at the Castle was declared by all the guests to have been absolutely one of the most charming they had ever spent. To her it was one long miserable torture. How she got through the hours she could not have told. Pride, the knowledge of Esther's loving presence, the kind courteous way in which Lord Greville seemed to suggest that she was the honoured guest of the occasion, all helped to keep up her courage when it would have faltered and deserted her. She sang as she had never sung before. She sang because she knew that she gave Greville pleasure through his mother, apart from his own delight in her voice. Lady Barrackbourne's couch was wheeled into the drawing-room, and she lay listening to the music with an almost hungry intensity that spoke her appreciation and pleasure more clearly than words.

Paul Angelotti was amazed at Mary's singing. He sat away in a corner watching her, as she stood like some pictured angel beside the piano, her pure, rich voice touching the heart with every note.

She was indeed his rival! She, the woman whom he had driven out of his life, crushed beneath the weight of a shame he had put upon her.

It was a curious state of things that had come to pass, and not without its irritating and annoying complexion.

He was not used to be defied, to be openly ignored, to be passed over as though he had never been. He bit his moustache with a sort of savage anger.

He longed to take Mary by her two white arms and shake the contempt and cold indifference from her.

She must have some weakness. Had she not fallen down in a dead faint that day in London when she had first seen him?

This manner of hers was, then, only the armour of pride and courage.

Could he not find some point in the armour through which he could dart an arrow, and so make her wince beneath his touch?

He rose from his seat in the dark corner and made his way slowly across the room after Mary had sung twice.

"What words can I say?" he murmured, in his soft, broken English. "Mrs. Arbuthnot, you have kept me silent. To praise such art as yours, in the ordinary jargon of everyday life, is impossible."

"I am glad I have pleased you, M. Angelotti," Mary said, quietly.

She was sitting idly by the piano, her hands wandering over the keys.

There was not the slightest tremor apparent in her touch, nor did her face betray any nervousness.

Paul Angelotti stood silent for a moment, looking down on her delicate beauty.

"Ma foi!" he said to himself, the beating of his heart quickening a little. "Ma foi! she is divine! She is like a saint, with her sweet, pure face. Yet she is a woman

withal. She will make me mad with her coldness. Will nothing move her?"

They were almost alone; a knot of two or four stood near them, but not close enough to hear what was said in a low voice.

Angelotti came a step nearer.

"Do you know I have a curious fancy about you, madame?" he said, softly, looking at her steadily the while. "I fear you do not like me; nay, more, that you will not let yourself like me. Is my fancy true?"

"I do not know you, M. Angelotti," Mary answered, quietly.

The womanly dignity within her gave her strength at this moment.

The repugnance that had been dawning of late in her heart against that miserable folly and girlish infatuation strengthened her contempt.

All the wrongs this man had wrought upon her came back threefold now as he stood before her, and she realized what a hideous pretence for a hero or even an ordinary honourable mortal he was.

"Is that quite true, Mary?" he whispered softly, beneath his breath.

Her hands wandered on over the keys. She did not wince or flush as he hoped she would do.

The aversion within her, the horror she had for him, kept her cold as ice, with every command over herself. She raised her eyes to his steadily. What glorious eyes they were!

"I do not know you, M. Angelotti," she repeated. Then she broke into the opening bars of some song. "Will you sing this with me?" she said, quite easily. "Of course you know it, I need not ask you. Lord Greville, will you tell Lady Barrackbourne that M. Angelotti and I are going to

sing the duet she spoke to me about when I was here last?"

She smiled into Greville's handsome face; the smile and the pleasant look she gave him seemed as though a burst of sunshine had fallen on her pale, exquisite face. It was a glimpse of the warmth Paul Angelotti desired to wake, and desired in vain.

Her self-control astounded him so much he was almost dumbfounded. Mechanically he stood upright beside her while she played the opening bars of the duet. He knew it well, and he knew too she had chosen it on purpose. It was one he had tried to teach her in a few idle moments in that (to him) strange dream-like past. He could recall how he had first frightened her by his savage impatience, and then pushed her away roughly, declaring she was too stupid to be taught anything.

Mary's voice rose clear, sweet and strong in her part. To him it was nothing less than a direct and distinct challenge to enmity. His vanity, his anger, his hot, savage, passionate nature swelled up within him.

She desired warfare then? Well, let it be war; she would discover before long what a mistake she made. She would have done well to be hesitated before she rejected his overtures of friendship. It was not only man against woman in this case. He looked across the room to where lone sat watching them as a cat would watch a mouse.

He smiled as he opened his lips and sang. He remembered that scene at Lady Greville's dinner table not many days before, and the remembrance gave him some satisfaction. Ione hated Mary, hated her as only a vain, jealous woman could hate one whose beauty and talent made her rival to be feared.

Let him but work properly; it would not be long before he had crushed Mary's proud spirit. For meanness and mischief Angelotti knew Ione would not fail him. It should be woman against woman, and Mary should learn that for every contemptuous word, every cold, disdainful look, every hint she gave of the repugnance she had conceived for him, and for his treacherous nature, he would be paid back and revenged threefold.

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 2001. Back Nos. can be obtained through any Newsvagent.)

HAVE YOU EVER LOST A CHILD.

Friend of mine, since you have started
On the tide of life so wild,
'Mid your other cares and sorrows,
Have you ever lost a child?

Have you ever looked, though vainly,
For the eyelids to unclose?
For the joyful, happy spirit
To break up the soft repose?

Have you seen the death sweat gather
Thickly on the little brow?
Seen the baby-cheek go rigid,
And the red lips white as snow?

Have you seen them rob your darling
In the garments of the grave,
With no balm to soothe your anguish,
And no hand stretched out to save?

If you have not, pray the Father,
That amid your sorrows wild,
He may spare you this one anguish,
May you never lose a child!

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Facetiæ.

PLENTY OF COMPANY.—Mrs. Suburb: "What is your objection to the country?" Domestic: "I am afraid I shall be lonely." Mrs. Suburb: "Impossible. There are sixteen in family."

WELCOME INFORMATION.—Tramp: "Please, mum, I haven't a friend or a relative in the world." Housekeeper: Well, I'm glad there's no one to worry over you in case you get hurt. Here, Tiger!"

QUIET FURNISHINGS.—Mrs. Minks (proudly showing her new home): "The furnishings you see are not at all ostentatious. They are very quiet." Mrs. Winks (enviously): "Yes, I notice you have no piano."

NOT ENOUGH ROOM.—Mrs. Stout: "The stolid selfishness of men in trams is disgusting." Her Husband: "What's happened?" Mrs. Stout: "I entered a crowded tramcar to-day, and only two men got up."

WHERE TO BEGIN.—Mrs. Trotabout: "I shall be off the greater part of the day, as I have joined the Society for the Suppression of Needless and Nerve-Racking Noises." Mr. T.: "Good idea, my dear. Take the baby with you."

TOUGH UNDERPINNING.—Minks: "Lame again, I see." Winks: "Yes; my feet are very tender, and shoes always hurt." Minks: "Mine are tough—tough as pine knots. Why, I can even wear shoes that are made to measure."

A GOOD SCHOOL.—Surface: "I see that nearly all the rich men of to-day began their careers by teaching school." Deepun: "Yes, a man who succeeds in getting along with an average lot of school directors can make his way anywhere."

HER POINT OF VIEW.—Husband: "Do you know that every time a woman gets angry she adds a new wrinkle to her face?" Wife: "No, I did not; but if it is so, I presume it is a wise provision of Nature to let the world know what sort of a husband a woman has."

HARD ON RATS.—Stranger: "Why don't you clear the rats out of your chicken-house?" Farmer Basie: "They don't do no harm." Stranger: "Don't they eat eggs?" Farmer Basie: "They used to, but not now. I think these new-fashioned china nesteggs has a sort o' discouraged 'em."

WHY THEY DON'T MARRY.—Miss Leftover: "You are a woman-hater, I hear." Mr. Silmpurse: "That is a mistake. I merely cannot afford to marry." Miss Leftover: "Cannot you support a wife?" Mr. Silmpurse: "Oh, yes, I could support a wife easy enough, but I haven't income enough to support the two or three other women she would need to wait on her."

JUST LIKE A WOMAN.—"Them women make me tired," said the First Telegraph Operator, as he opened his switch. "What's the matter now?" asked the Second Telegraph Operator. "One of 'em was just in here and wanted to know why we wouldn't let her put a postscript to a ten word message, without charging her extra. Said it wasn't part of the message, anyway."

NO EXPERIENCE.—Manager: "Yes, there are a few vacancies in my company. Have you been on the stage long?" Lady: "About ten years." "Ah! then you have had a good deal of experience." "N-no. I can't say that I have." "But you acted." "No; there was never anything for me to do." "Ah, I see. You have been in the company of a great actress who wrote the plays herself."

Helpful Talks.

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

MOUNT.—King Cophetua was a mythical monarch of Africa, of great wealth, who fell in love with a beggar girl and married her. The legend has been verified by Tennyson in "The Beggar Maid."

K. HILL.—Catarrh of the nose in its early stages may be relieved by snuffing up a weak solution of refined borax and water, and letting it pass from the nasal passage to the throat, whence it should be ejected from the mouth. Use this solution three or four times a day. In chronic cases a physician should be consulted.

NED.—Various articles are suitable for presentation to a young lady on attaining her twenty-first birthday, depending upon the means of the donor and their terms of intimacy. Here are a few appropriate gifts: A set of books by a popular author, an opera glass, a beautiful pen, any article of jewellery, a neatly bound book of poems, or anything in the way of art novelties.

CRICKET ON THE HEARTH.—The noise made by crickets is caused by the rubbing of the bases of the wing cases against each other. The chirping of the domestic cricket is regarded by many persons as a good omen, but to many the noise becomes disagreeable. They are quite harmless, frequenting the corners of fireplaces, from which they emerge when the inmates of the house have retired to rest.

DARK MAGDALEN.—Cease all communications with the insulting fellow, and should he persist in annoying you with further letters, show them to your father, and he will know how to treat the despicable wretch. A good whipping in the public street might bring him into a condition of outward respectability, by convincing him that an outrageous breach of decorum cannot be committed with impunity.

K. WOOD.—"The cups that cheer but not inebriate," is a quotation from "The Task," by Cowper. Here is the passage:

"Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
And while the bubbling and loud-hissing urn
Throws up a steamy column, and the cups
That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each,
So let us welcome peaceful evening in."

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MARY.—To take iron stains out of marble, have an equal quantity of fresh spirit of vitriol and lemon juice mixed in a bottle; shake it well; wet the spots, and in a few minutes rub with soft linen until they disappear.

J. FALLA.—Deceit and hypocrisy were exposed by the slightest touch of Ithuriel's spear. Ithuriel was the angel sent by Gabriel to discover Satan. He found him squatting like a toad beside Eve as she lay asleep, and brought him before Gabriel. The incident is fully described in Milton's "Paradise Lost."

COLUMBINE.—No prudent young lady will become too confidential with a young man until she is sure that he desires to win her. To impart family secrets to him, and then discover that he has been divulging them to others, brings its own mortification and regret, and will teach a lesson that is not likely to be soon forgotten. Some young men are as fond of gossip as any female busybody that ever existed.

LOUIS.—The Fiction of the Devil's Bridge is narrated in Longfellow's "Golden Legend." It was proposed to construct a bridge to span a dangerous ravine. His Satanic Majesty had foiled all attempts at building it; but at last allowed it to be finished on the awful condition that the first living creature that passed over should be claimed by him. The abbot who wished to build it, agreed, and when the bridge was completed, the first living creature that passed over was a hungry dog chasing a loaf deftly flung by the abbot from one end to the other.

T. CALLENDER.—Since the year 1059 the Pope has been formally elected by the College of Cardinals. The cardinals meet on the eleventh day after the Pope's decease, in a series of double cells, in the Vatican, one of the cells being for cardinal and the other for the secretary or chamberlain. On the twelfth day the election begins, a two-thirds vote being necessary to elect the Pope. All communications with the outside world or between themselves is shut off from the cardinals, their food being passed through an opening in the cell. They are not bound to elect a cardinal—only heretics or persons guilty of simony are excluded—and after an agreement of two-thirds has been reached, the closing act of the election and announcement of the vote takes place in a chapel reserved for that purpose.

F. RYAN.—The cause of yawning and stretching, on arising from slumber, is explained by the fact that during sleep the respiration is not so deep as when we are awake, and the expansion of the lungs is insufficient for active movement. It is necessary, therefore, to fully expand the lungs on waking, before or as soon as active movements commence. This is affected by a yawn, which is a deep inspiration, assisted by the wide opening of the mouth. The depth of the inspiration is often assisted by raising the arms above the head and by throwing forward the chest, and thus yawning and stretching are only parts of one inspiratory effort. Stretching also aids the return of the blood to the muscles. During sleep the circulation is feebler, and the skin seems to be supplied with blood at the expense of the muscles, and on waking the limbs are stretched to ensure their being in working order, and to restore to them their normal blood supply. Toward night it is not uncommon for a similar reduction in the depth of the respiration, and a consequent reduction in the rapidity of the circulation, to take place, and this is corrected by a similar yawning and stretching as on waking.

SYLVIA.—Well, my dear girl, it is very difficult to advise you when duty is pulling one way and inclination another. When this young man, who now declares his love for you, first began to single you out for little attentions you did not think anything of it, and these little preliminaries on his part had in no way prepared you for the "bomb" he has sprung on you. But now that he has spoken the flood gates of your heart have suddenly opened, and you have no doubt that if you permitted yourself to think seriously of his proposal that he is the one man with whom you would venture to entrust your future happiness. Now what stands in the way? Your duty to those at home? This is a question that has presented itself to many a girl in a similar position. In your case I really do not consider it so difficult an arrangement. Deprived of the counsel of mother, whom you lost at an early age, you have acted the part to your younger brothers and sisters. Now that they are grown up and can shift for themselves they have not the same claim on you, and I am inclined to hint that possibly you now owe a duty to yourself. However, do not be in a hurry to give a definite answer and take the young man into your confidence just a little. Your own heart must finally decide so momentous a question.

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